

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Tuesday, Feb. 20

Senior Menu: Ham rotini bake, mixed Monterey blend, peas, honey fruit salad, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Egg omelets.  
School Lunch: Hot dots, fries.  
Girls Basketball Region 1A: 7:30 p.m.: Groton Area vs. Webster Area at Aberdeen Roncalli.  
City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.  
Thrift Store open 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.  
Food Pantry open 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Quilting, 9 a.m.  
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

**Groton Daily Independent**  
**PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445**  
**Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460**

*"What's one thing we have in our lives that we can depend on? A dog or cat loving us unconditionally, every day."*

JON KATZ



## Wednesday, Feb. 21

Senior Menu: Swiss steak, mashed potatoes with gravy, vegetable winter blend, carrot bars, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: French toast.  
School Lunch: Cheese nachos.  
Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Service at Rosewood Court, 10 a.m.; Soup Supper (Emmanuel Men serving), 6 p.m.; Worship, 7 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Lent Service, 7 p.m.  
United Methodist: Community coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation, 6 p.m.; Groton Ad Council, 7 p.m., Lent Bible Study, 7 p.m.

## **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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# 1440

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Israel is expected to expand its ground operation in Gaza's southern city of Rafah by the start of Ramadan if Hamas does not return the remaining hostages held in the enclave by then, Israel's war minister warned. Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting, will begin around March 10 this year based on the sighting of a new crescent moon.

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange will make what could be his final court appearance today in his long-running appeal against extradition to the US, where he is accused of leaking thousands of classified

military documents. Assange has been held in London's high-security Belmarsh prison since his arrest in 2019; the British government approved an order to extradite him in 2022.

Astronomers have identified what is believed to be the most luminous object in the universe, roughly 12 billion light-years away, according to a study released yesterday. The 7-light-year wide quasar, which is also powered by the fastest-growing black hole observed to date, is said to be 500 trillion times brighter than the sun.

## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

William Byron edges teammate Alex Bowman to win 2024 Daytona 500; race was postponed due to heavy rains over the weekend.

UConn women's basketball coach Geno Auriemma picks up 1,203rd win to pass former Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski for second-most NCAA Division I college basketball coaching wins; Auriemma is now six wins behind Stanford coach Tara VanDerveer.

"Bob Marley: One Love" biopic film hauls in \$80M to lead all films at global box office. "Home Improvement" star Zachery Ty Bryan arrested for DUI.

## Science & Technology

James Webb Space Telescope finds evidence suggesting Eris and Makemake, a pair of dwarf planets in the Kuiper Belt in the outer solar system, are geologically active. What is the Kuiper Belt?

Historians discover use of the decimal point can be traced to the mid-15th century, roughly 150 years earlier than previously believed; concept found initial use in real-world business transactions.

Large-scale genomic survey reveals an estimated 275 million previously unknown genetic variants; "All of Us" National Institutes for Health initiative aims to build an expansive database for precision medicine.

## Business & Markets

Capital One to acquire Discover Financial Services in \$35.3B all-stock deal; Capital One shareholders will own roughly 60% of the combined company when the deal closes, while Discover shareholders will own roughly 40%.

French auto parts giant Forvia to cut up to 10,000 jobs over the next five years amid global shift to electric vehicles; Forvia expects to save roughly \$540M annually starting in 2028.

Microsoft-backed OpenAI reportedly completes deal valuing the company at more than \$80B. European Union opens formal investigation into TikTok for possibly breaching the bloc's new digital rules concerning safety of minors.

## Politics & World Affairs

California braces for another round of heavy rain, flooding, and mountain snow through tomorrow due to an atmospheric river; comes two weeks after a previous storm hit Southern California with record daily rain.

Haitian judge indicts 51 people in 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, including Moïse's widow, a former prime minister, and a former police chief. A 25-year-old suspect arrested in murder of two people found in dorm at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs.

Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers (D) approves new legislative maps after state's Supreme Court in December found previous maps favored Republicans and were unconstitutional.

## Dakotans for Health threatens lawsuit over signature withdrawal bill

By Stu Whitney

South Dakota News Watch

The group sponsoring a constitutional amendment to expand South Dakota abortion rights said it will likely file a lawsuit if legislators pass a bill allowing petitioners to withdraw signatures that have already been certified for the ballot.

"I can't speculate about whether the bill will pass or not," said Rapid City lawyer Jim Leach, who represents Dakotans for Health, a grassroots organization that pushes for progressive policy through petition efforts. "I can say that if it does pass, there's certainly a substantial possibility of legal action."

At issue is House Bill 1244, which would change South Dakota's ballot initiative process by allowing an individual who signed a petition to withdraw their signature by sending a written notification to the Secretary of State's office. This could occur after the petition effort has been validated but is still eligible to be challenged through the Secretary of State or court appeal.

The bill, which has an emergency clause allowing it to take effect immediately, passed the House State Affairs Committee on Feb. 14 by a vote of 11-1.

If successful, the legislation would make South Dakota one of five states – along with California, Idaho, Utah and Washington – with a codified process for revocation of petition signatures. No other states allow a citizen to withdraw their signature after a ballot amendment has cleared the certification process.

The bill's sponsor is Rep. Jon Hansen, R-Dell Rapids, one of the state's leading anti-abortion advocates as co-chair of the Life Defense Fund, founded specifically to oppose the proposed amendment through its "Decline to Sign" campaign. Hansen is also vice president of South Dakota Right to Life.

### Prolonged state battle over abortion

Hansen has sparred regularly with Dakotans for Health executive director Rick Weiland in a high-stakes battle between strongly held pro-life positions in conservative South Dakota and long-established state protections for residents to initiate laws through the petition process.

In a 2022 poll of registered voters co-sponsored by South Dakota News Watch, nearly two-thirds (65%) of respondents said they support having a statewide referendum to determine the state's laws regarding reproductive rights.

The proposed 2024 ballot amendment would enshrine abortion rights in the South Dakota Constitution by following the trimester framework of *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark 1973 ruling in which the Supreme



**Protesters against the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* hold signs and chant as they sit, blocking a portion of Phillips Avenue in Sioux Falls, S.D., in 2022.** (Photo: Sioux Falls Argus Leader)





**Rep. Jon Hansen, R-Dell Rapids, listens to Gov. Kristi Noem give the State of the State address on Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2024, at the South Dakota State Capitol in Pierre, S.D.** (Photo: Samantha Laury / Argus Leader)

Court held that the Constitution protected a woman's right to an abortion prior to the viability of the fetus.

South Dakota is currently under a 2005 state trigger law activated when the Supreme Court overturned Roe and left it up to states to determine reproductive rights with its 2022 ruling in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization.

South Dakota's law makes it a Class 6 felony for anyone "who administers to any pregnant female or prescribes or procures for any pregnant female" a means for an abortion, except to save the life of the mother. South Dakota is one of 14 states whose abortion law does not include exceptions for rape and incest.

### South Dakota petition process comes under fire

At the committee hearing for HB 1244, Hansen played videos purporting to show proof of unattended Dakotans for Health petitions, which would violate state law, and of circulators providing misleading information to the public.

He noted that Attorney General Marty Jackley sent a letter to Dakotans for Health on Oct. 31, 2023 that mentioned "video and photographic evidence" of such encounters and warned of potentially illegal actions taken by petition circulators.

Jackley said that his letter was based on "complaints and concerns raised during the petition process" and that violations, if proven, could play a role in the Secretary of State's petition certification process. South Dakota Right to Life was copied on the letter.

"If you obtain petition signatures through fraud or misleading information, that's not democracy," Hansen said during hearing testimony. "We want to ensure that people have (signed) voluntarily and on good information."

Weiland said his group trains petition circulators to follow state law, including handing out slips of paper with the attorney general's title and explanation of the proposed amendment. He said the larger issue is the harassment his volunteers have experienced at the hands of Life Defense Fund demonstrators.

Leach, when asked about Hansen's allegations, told News Watch: "I think they are deceptive and overblown. I also think that anyone who would rely on Jon Hansen for accurate information on this issue is making a big mistake."

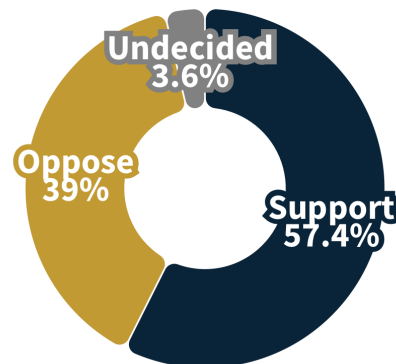
Hansen didn't respond to questions from News Watch about the potential impact of his signature withdrawal bill and whether the changes are aimed specifically at the proposed abortion amendment.

### Weiland's goal for petition: 60,000 signatures

Dakotans for Health needs to collect a minimum of 35,017 signatures to place the abortion amendment on the November 2024 ballot. Weiland told News Watch that his group has collected more than 50,000 signatures, of which 43,000 have gone through an in-house validation process.

"We have another 10,000 that are going through that internal process," added Weiland, whose goal is to submit 60,000 signatures to the Secretary of State's office. The deadline is May 7, but Dakotans for Health might submit the signatures as early as

2022 News Watch poll: Do you support or oppose having legal access to abortion medications in South Dakota?



Source: South Dakota News Watch and the Chiesman Center for Democracy at USD • Mason-Dixon Polling & Strategy (Margin of error: +/-4.5%)  
Graphic: Michael Klinski / South Dakota News Watch

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**Members of Jericho Wall, an all-male anti-abortion prayer group, pray the rosary outside Planned Parenthood on Tuesday, Sept. 28, 2021, in Sioux Falls, S.D.** (Photo: Argus Leader)

Argus Leader)

Supreme Court, which found signature revocation to be politically motivated rather than a "neutral and non-discriminatory protection of citizens' interests."

In other words, the court found that the law was designed to thwart a particular ballot initiative rather than attempting to improve the petition process as a whole.

The ruling also noted that laws already were in place to prevent fraud or forgery in the ballot initiative process, as there are in South Dakota.

"The statute and its implementing regulations are not well calculated to reduce perceived instances of forgery and fraud," read the Florida Supreme Court opinion. "To the contrary, they provide initiative opponents an unchecked, unopposed opportunity to 'persuade' Florida electors ... to revoke their signatures based upon these opponents' strident disagreement with the underlying initiative proposals."

## **Abortion battlegrounds take shape**

Zebadiah Johnson, representing the Voter Defense Association of South Dakota, spoke at the Feb. 14 committee hearing about signature withdrawal campaigns that have occurred in states with revocation laws.

Johnson also noted the "sudden disruption" to the signature gathering process that would occur with less than three months before the petition deadline, an argument also made by the Florida Supreme Court's majority opinion in 2010.

"Initiative proponents will likely receive no notice with regard to how many of their gathered, signed petition forms have been revoked until it is too late to gather, submit, and verify additional signatures," the court wrote. "The politically charged counter-petition revocation campaigns created by these provisions in operation would essentially eviscerate and render meaningless the citizen-initiative process."

The proposed amendment reflects a national trend of progressive groups using the ballot initiative process to gain ground on abortion rights since the Supreme Court rolled back federal protections by overturning *Roe v. Wade*.

Election wins have come in conservative states such as Ohio, where 57% of voters approved a constitutional amendment in November 2023 that ensured access to abortion and other forms of reproductive health care.

In Kansas, voters overwhelmingly rejected a 2022 constitutional amendment that would have allowed the

the end of March, he said.

Hansen has said that his group will undertake its own process to verify abortion amendment signatures prior to certification. But HB 1244 would allow opponents of the measure to approach petition signers to potentially withdraw their name as part of an appeal process even if initial signatures are certified. State law dictates that the appeal would be heard to the circuit court of Hughes County in Pierre.

"That way these challenges would occur under a judge's supervision," Hansen said during the hearing, adding that it's "practically impossible" for an individual to find the exact petition they signed and cross off their name under the current process.

## **Similar bill struck down in Florida**

A similar law in Florida was declared unconstitutional in 2010 by the Florida

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Republican-led Legislature to tighten restrictions or ban abortion outright, with 59% voting against the amendment.

Petition efforts are also under way in states such as Arizona, Florida, Nevada and Nebraska to try to put the issue before voters in 2024, a presidential election year in which high turnout is expected.

## Lawmakers formally oppose abortion amendment

The South Dakota Legislature has passed House Concurrent Resolution 6008, which formalizes opposition to the abortion amendment and asserts that the proposed law would "fail to protect human life, would fail to protect a pregnant woman, and would fail to protect the child she bears."

The resolution passed the House 63-7 and the Senate 29-3.

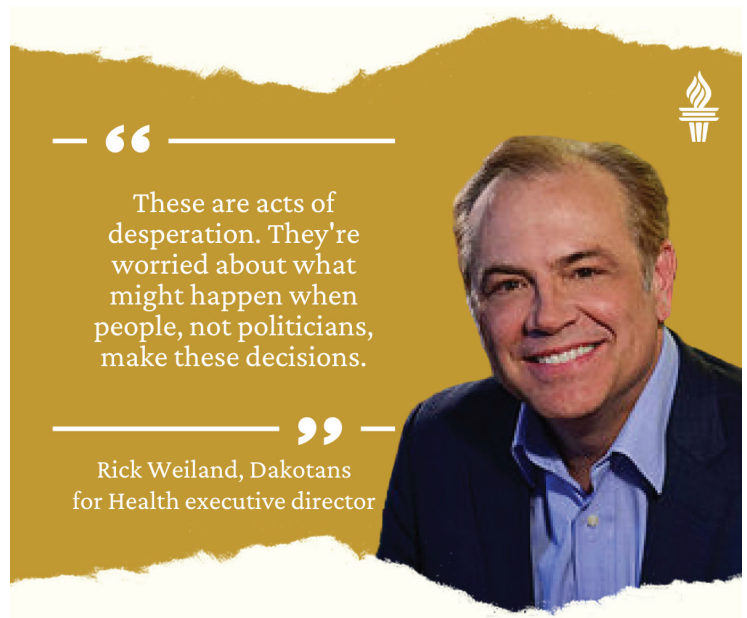
Weiland, testifying against the resolution at a Feb. 7 committee hearing after wheeling in 50,000 signed petitions, called out inaccuracies in the language and asserted that South Dakota voters have twice rejected extreme abortion bans at the polls.

In 2006, the Legislature passed a law to ban all abortions except those to save the life of a pregnant woman. The measure was signed by then-Gov. Mike Rounds, but opponents gathered enough signatures to refer it to the ballot, where it was defeated with more than 55% percent of the vote.

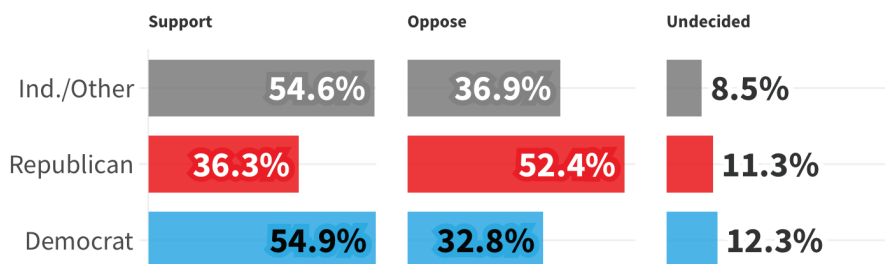
Two years later, voters rejected by a margin of 55% to 45% a ballot initiative that would have banned all abortions in the state except in cases of rape or incest or "to preserve the health or life of the woman."

South Dakota's current law is among the nation's most restrictive, and Weiland said anti-abortion factions are worried about letting voters have their say. A November 2023 poll of registered voters co-sponsored by News Watch showed a potentially close race, with 45.6% of respondents supporting the proposed constitutional amendment and 43.6% opposed.

"These are acts of desperation," Weiland said of legislative efforts to hinder the ballot initiative process. "They're worried about what might happen when people, not politicians, make these decisions."



## Abortion constitutional amendment poll by party



Source: South Dakota News Watch and the Chiesman Center for Democracy at USD • Mason-Dixon Polling & Strategy  
(Margin of error: +/-4.5%)

Graphic: Michael Klinski / South Dakota News Watch

## Petition laws have faced challenges in South Dakota

Leach portrayed HB 1244 as the latest attempt by Hansen and other Republican leaders to disrupt the rights of citizens to petition their government. The ballot initiative process dates back more than 125 years in South Dakota and was extended to include constitutional amendments in 1972.

Hansen, a Dell Rapids lawyer who was first voted into the Legislature in 2010, has sponsored several pieces of legislation that curtailed ballot initiative procedures and were later declared unconstitutional.



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In 2019 he sponsored House Bill 1094, creating a state registry of petition circulators and requiring them to submit personal information and wear ID badges. Leach sued along with liberal blogger Cory Heidelberger, saying the law violated circulators' First Amendment rights based on their political viewpoint, and the law was struck down.

In 2020 Hansen sponsored Senate Bill 180, with a similar objective as HB 1094 but focused solely on paid circulators. U.S. District Judge Larry Piersol issued a preliminary injunction in response to a lawsuit from Leach and Dakotans for Health. And in 2022 the Eighth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals upheld the injunction, calling the law's pre-circulation disclosure requirements "intrusive and burdensome ... as such, they are a severe burden on speech."

Hansen also sponsored Amendment C, which was placed on the 2022 primary ballot and would have required a 60% vote (rather than simple majority) for ballot measures that raise taxes or spend \$10 million in general funds in their first five years. That amendment, viewed as a preemptive strike against Medicaid expansion, was rejected by 67% of voters.

Asked if the signature withdrawal bill continues a pattern of trying to alter the ballot amendment process, Leach told News Watch that Hansen and his supporters are "scraping the bottom of the barrel" as the election draws nearer.

"I'm just shaking my head at all this," Leach said. "We plan to keep fighting to preserve the rights of citizens to propose and vote on the laws they're going to be subject to."

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Sun Dial Manor is an Equal Employment Opportunity Employer  
(0214.0221)

## Finance Officer Wanted

The Town of Andover is seeking a Finance Officer. This is a part time position. Must know word and excel. Resume can be sent to P O Box 35,

Andover, SD 57422, or email to [bsmith@nvc.net](mailto:bsmith@nvc.net). A complete job description is available by call 605-265-0236. EOE. (0214.0221)



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## That's life/Tony Bender: A tale of two Bettys

You may have heard my hypothesis before, that small towns produce a larger percentage of big personalities. The nicknames. Colorful escapades, the kind that would get you arrested anywhere else.

Hettinger was like that when I rolled in back in 1991. The only thing that was green in that dusty cowboy town nestled among the buttes was me. Still learning my craft. Still learning how local government worked. The nuts and bolts. The nuts.

For all the vaquero misogyny—Ted Uecker once called my fiancée “a good looking heifer”—women were major players at City Hall and at the Adams County Courthouse. There were two Bettys. Two different spellings, two different personalities. City Councilwoman Bette Sanger was a tough-talking hat-wearing broad in the best sense of the word. She wore bloody red lipstick that may have been made from the hemorrhages she inflicted. She was opinionated. I always imagined her as a flapper in her youth.

When she viewed the front page feature story of former state's attorney and Republican activist Tom Secret, she snorted, “There he is... a horse's ass!”

When I discovered that the Hettinger City Council had used a since-closed loophole to avoid publishing public notices, I petitioned them to restore the minutes to the Adams County Record so taxpayers could be informed.

Well, they shot the snot-nosed newcomer down, a declaration of war. So, each week, I left a bordered blank space in the paper explaining that this is where the minutes had last run at a cost of \$36 or so. I wrote editorials. Encouraged residents to give their pocket change to council members. A county commissioner gave the mayor a dime. After a month, even Bette Sanger had had enough. I'll never forget her motion. “Well, I suppose it's time to grease the squeaky wheel.”

Then there was Adams County Auditor Betty Svihovec. Classy, almost regal. Always impeccably dressed. There were two women's clothing stores in town. I suspect she was a good customer. When the County Commission met, she glided into the room and deftly steered the peoples' business. She was the best politician in town but I doubt that most people grasped her impact.

Glancing over her obituary last week I learned that she'd gone to work in the courthouse after high school graduation in 1954. Four years later, she was the auditor. The queen of Adams County, really.

I had much to learn about the workings of local government, and I remember Commissioner Lenny Jacobs (later a legislator) kindly pausing meetings and leaning back in his chair to give me the background on a particular issue. Betty, too, had a way of explaining issues without condescension.

I didn't find them above reproach, however. They had a way of turning a 90-minute meeting into three hours, complete with a donut break. Betty brought the donuts. I kind of ticked off my friend and commissioner Darrell Papka when I dedicated an editorial to the evils of pastries and government inefficiency. I don't think Betty batted an eye, however. She was the coolest of customers.

I've opined in the past that the key to good government is a great auditor or business manager. It didn't take me too many meetings to understand the impact Betty Svihovec had. She presented the information in such a way that you'd have to be a complete idiot not to make the right decision. And even if, for the sake of argument, a commissioner wanted to explore the path of idiocy, she respectfully steered them straight. She didn't have a vote, but she was the most powerful force in the courthouse.

And beyond.

“Betty truly held a special place in my heart,” eulogized Blanche (Weishaar) Schumacher, a former auditor. “Not only was she the county auditor from my home county of Adams, but when I was appointed and later elected as Logan County Auditor, she was the go to wealth of knowledge and information for many county-related projects/duties. Betty knew no strangers in the North Dakota County Auditor's Association—she treated each and every one of us like we were her family. Thank you, Betty, and rest in peace, my dear friend.”

I hadn't seen her in years, but I think we have statues in our minds of those who impacted us and so it is with her. Was anyone more influential, did anyone provide more leadership in Adams County than Betty Svihovec? I think not.

I'll take an apple fritter, Betty.



## We the People

The South Dakota Humanities Council is making available a weekly column -- "We the People" -- that focuses on the U.S. Constitution. It is written by David Adler, who is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality, and civic education.



By David Adler

### The Supreme Court at the Beginning: What to Wear?

The photos and images of U.S. Supreme Court Justices portraying earnest men and women wrestling with momentous legal issues and controversies, the resolution of which will shape American society, politics and the constitutional landscape, fairly capture the serious side of those seated on the nation's High Tribunal. But that's not the Justices' only side. There is another.

In the beginning, indeed, on the first day that the Supreme Court of the United States convened—February 2, 1790—the most important issue confronting the Justices was what to wear to work. Seriously.

As such, the Justices faced the same question that many of us contemplate as we approach our first day on the job—appropriate workplace attire. The issue was a controversial one that went beyond members of the Court. Alexander Hamilton, whose daily dress promoted sartorial splendor, suggested the English wig and gown. Thomas Jefferson, who differed with Hamilton on so many issues, was at odds with him on the question of judicial attire. Jefferson, given to dressing as though every day were Saturday, opposed both. He said, however, that if the gown was to be worn, "For Heaven's sake, discard the monstrous wig which makes the English judges look like rats peeping through benches of oakum!"

As if to test the thesis, Justice William Cushing arrived in New York wearing an outdated judicial wig. Observers noted that the wig created excitement. A group of boys followed the Justice down the street. Cushing was oblivious to the commotion until a sailor confronted him and exclaimed, "My eye! What a wig!" At that point, an embarrassed Justice retreated to his lodgings and discarded the wig. Cushing never wore a wig again, and neither did any of the other Justices.

The Supreme Court first convened in the Royal Exchange, on Broad Street in New York City. Although the Justices did not wear wigs, they were nattily dressed in black and red robes, attire that impressed spectators and suggested gravity, elegance and neatness. The public approved.

The Court's beginnings were hardly auspicious, despite its distinguished membership. The occasion was formal, and newspapers followed it closely, reporting all the details of the first meeting of the third branch of government. The Court lacked the stature and prestige that it would accrue through the years. Hamilton's description of the judiciary as "the least dangerous branch," was reflected in the disinterest of some offered an appointment to the Court, in the lack of organization and adequate staffing.

Only four of the six men that had been appointed by President George Washington, and quickly confirmed by the U.S. Senate, showed up for the first meeting. Robert H. Harrison declined appointment, likely because he considered his position as Chancellor of Maryland to be more important than a seat on the U.S. Supreme Court. John Rutledge, although a member of the Supreme Court for its first three terms, attended only one session and soon resigned to accept the position of Chief Justice of South Carolina.

Little attention was paid to the organizational and administrative details and needs of the Court, at its first meeting and throughout its first Term in 1790. The Court had nothing to do except admit attorneys to its bar, and it shortly adjourned. It began as a court without an official reporter, litigants, a docket, appeals or decisions to make. For its first two years, it heard no cases and made no substantive decisions until 1793.

John Jay, the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, shed light on the beleaguered state of the Court in its early years. At the request of President Washington, Jay took leave from the Court and spent considerable time in England, negotiating what became known as the Jay Treaty (1794). After resigning from the Court in 1795, he was invited by President John Adams in 1800 to return to the Court, once again as Chief Justice, as successor to Oliver Ellsworth. When Jay was offered the position, he declined it because of the arduous responsibilities of riding circuit, but he also cited the Court's lack of "energy, weight and

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dignity," which he said were necessary to support the national government. And, he added, the Court lacked "public confidence and respect." He returned to New York to become Governor.

Jay's decision to pass on President Adams's offer was the Supreme Court's gain. Adams proceeded to nominate John Marshall, who became, and remains, the nation's greatest Chief Justice. Marshall converted the Court into a truly co-equal branch of government and laid the foundation for it to become the authoritative interpreter of the Constitution.

It is difficult for us today to realize that, at the beginning, a seat on the Court was little more than an opportunity to complete a distinguished legal career. Even that, however, was not enough to secure the service of some strong and experienced attorneys. But the humble beginnings of the Court are a thing of the past. "Since Marshall's time," Justice Felix Frankfurter once wrote, "only a madman would resign the chief justiceship to become governor," or for that matter, a state judge.

Today, the Supreme Court Justices flex their considerable judicial muscles to resolve the weightiest, and most contentious, legal issues of our time.

## Groton Area boys stun Dakota Valley in 17-point win

The game lived up to all the hype and intensity as the Groton Area boys avenged an earlier loss to Dakota Valley and handed the Panthers their third loss of the season. The game was played Monday in Groton and was a make-up game from earlier in the season. Groton Area won, 71-54. It was Dakota Valley's lowest scoring game of the season. The previous lowest was 62 points which came on the heels of Hamlin's win over Dakota Valley and was also 62 points in the Panther's win over Groton at the DAK12-NEC Clash at Madison.

Dakota Valley had the early 12-7 lead, but the Tiger defense forced turnovers and capitalized on them and took a 16-12 lead at the end of the first quarter. Groton Area had the upper hand for most of the second quarter with a four-point lead being the average. The Panthers tied the game at halftime at 29.

The first half stats were as even as it could possibly be. Both teams shot 57 percent in the first half. Both teams had five turnovers. Both teams had three fouls. Both teams missed nine field goals and both teams had 29 points.

Groton Area never trailed in the second half. The Panthers had closed to within one two times, but the Tigers went on a six-point run to take a 46-38 lead and took a 48-40 lead into the fourth quarter.

Keegen Tracy sparked the Tigers in the fourth quarter with 11 points and Lane Tietz was seven of eight from the free throw line as Groton Area slowly pulled away for the win.

Coach Brian Dolan said, "This is by far the best we've played all year. Our goal was to shut down Logan Collette and he only had one free throw all night. The kids were dialed in. Jacob did a nice job getting to the basket. Lane carried us in the first half and made some big free t throws down the stretch. It took all of us. We've had great practices the last 10 days. The players on the bench are just as much a part of this as the guys on the floor."

Senior Lane Tietz said after the game, "We played absolutely together tonight. We trusted each other. Everyone stepped up. When Gage came in - great minutes. When Kassen came in - got a deflection and got a layup. That's huge.

"In all the struggles we've had all year, they have gotten us to this point right now. At the beginning the season, I would ask God just to prepare this team to make a run for the state tournament. No one knows His plan, but He's gotten us ready for this moment. We've had a lot of growing pains with our younger guys, but they're not younger guys any more."

Groton Area is now 15-4 on the season and will finish the regular season with a home game against Aberdeen Christian in Groton on Friday. Dakota Valley falls to 15-3.

"Friday is the biggest game on our schedule right now," Dolan said. "It's a 47 point seed game for us. That will help us for our seeding for the SoDak 16. I want the kids to enjoy tonight, but we have to re-focus for Friday. This didn't happen just today. This happened in all the practices and all the hard work.

"Let's make sure we're all at Roncalli to support the girls in the first round of the region against Webster. That's the next big game for this family and we need to cheer them on."

The percentages were high in all categories for Groton Area. The Tigers made 15 of 28 in two-pointers for 54 percent, nine of 14 in three-pointers for 64 percent and 14 of 16 in free throws for 88 percent. The Tigers had 22 rebounds, nine turnovers, 16 assists, three steals, 13 team fouls and one block.

Lane Tietz led the Tigers with 28 points including six of 10 three-pointers and seven of eight free throws. Tietz also had four rebounds, three assists and one steal. Jacob Zak had 18 points which included one three-pointer and was five of six from the line plus he had three rebounds, six assists and one steal. Keegen Tracy had 16 points with included two of two in three-pointers, two of two in free throws and four of five in two-pointers and he had three rebounds and six assists. Logan Ringgenberg scored the opening basket of the game and finished with two points, two rebounds and one assist. Kassen Keough had two points. Gage Sippel had three rebounds and one block shot and Colby Dunker and Easton Weber each had one rebound.

Jaxson Wingert led the Panthers with 29 points while Luke Bruns had 14, Charlie Margeas eight and Grant VanDenHul and Logan Collette each had one free throw. Dakota Valley made 19 of 38 in field goals



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for 50 percent, 12 of 17 free throws for 71 percent, had eight turnovers and 13 team fouls.

Groton Area rallied in the closing minute to come from behind to beat Dakota Valley in the junior varsity game, 33-30. Groton Area held a 12-11 lead after the first quarter and Dakota Valley led at halftime, 18-15, and after three quarters, 24-17. The Panthers opened up a 10-point lead early in the fourth quarter at 27-17. Gage Sippel made seven fourth quarter points and Turner Thompson made a two-pointer and a three-pointer in the fourth quarter to spark the Tiger offense. Jayden Schwan made a basket with 46 seconds left to tie the game at 30. Sippel made a basket with 2.1 seconds left, was fouled and made the free throw for the final three-point win.

Sippel led the Tigers with seven points, Blake Pauli, Turner Thompson and Easton Weber each had five points, Karson Zak had four, Kassen Keough three and Jayden Schwan and Logan Warrington each had two points. Keough, Thompson and Weber each made one three-pointer.

Tyler Cornelsen led Dakota Valley with 12 points while Drew Lukken and Luke Anema each had four points, and adding two points apiece were Dylan Lukken, Sean Meiske, Grady Ramos, Zachary Schlotman and Carver Fritchen.

The games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM. The junior varsity game was sponsored by Craig and Jodi Sternhagen. The varsity game was sponsored by Agtegra, Avantara Groton, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, BK Custom Ts & More, Bierman Farm Service, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Full Circle Ag, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Krueger Brothers, Locke Electric, The MeatHouse of Andover, Rix Farms/R&M Farms and Spanier Harvesting and Trucking. Paul Kosel did the play-by-play and Jeslyn Kosel ran the camera.

- Paul Kosel

## Groton Prairie Mixed Bowling League Week #13 Results

**Team Standings:** Chipmunks – 17, Shihtzus – 16, Coyotes – 15, Jackelopes – 10, Foxes – 9, Cheetahs – 5

**Men's High Games:** Randy Stanley – 223, Tony Waage – 222, Lance Frohling and Vern Meyers – 218

**Women's High Games:** Sue Stanley – 163, Darci Spanier and Vicki Walter – 160, Hayley Merkel – 158

**Men's High Series:** Tony Waage – 604, Lance Frohling – 589, Mike Siegler – 547

**Women's High Series:** Darci Spanier – 455, Sue Stanley – 450, Vicki Walter – 448

**FUN GAME:** Most Splits - Chipmunks with 19!

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*Lady Tigers in  
Post Season  
Tournament Action!*



Photo by Alexa Schuring

Good Luck Tigers from these GDILIVE.COM sponsors!

Bary Keith at Harr Motors  
BK Custom Ts & More  
Blocker Construction  
Dacotah Bank  
Farmers Union Coop  
Groton Ag Partners  
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Spanier Harvesting & Trucking  
Sun & Sea Travel  
The Meat House  
Witte Exteriors LLC





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Latest Amtrak study maps include potential routes through Sioux Falls, Rapid City

BY: JOHN HULT - FEBRUARY 19, 2024 9:56 AM



The Proposed Network of Preferred Routes from the Federal Railroad Administration. The map includes routes through South Dakota, the only state in the contiguous U.S. to have never had passenger rail service. (image courtesy FRA)

A long distance rail study from the Federal Railroad Administration includes new maps showing two possible South Dakota passenger rail routes.

The routes would run through Sioux Falls and Rapid City on a line connecting the Twin Cities to Denver, and through Sioux Falls on a line connecting the Twin Cities and Kansas City.

The rail administration has conducted multiple rounds of stakeholder outreach through regional meetings since 2022, the year following the passage of President Joe Biden’s Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. That law included billions for expansion and upgrades to existing passenger rail service through Amtrak, as well as money for the administration to engage in the outreach project, which is called the Long-Distance Service Study.



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The maps themselves represent potential routes, not planned ones. The maps are labeled as a "Proposed Network of Preferred Routes," and the administration is taking public comments on them through March 8 at [contactus@fralongdistancerailstudy.org](mailto:contactus@fralongdistancerailstudy.org).

An organization based in Madison called All Aboard Northwest has pushed for the inclusion of South Dakota routes during the administration's regional meetings. South Dakota is the only state in the contiguous U.S. to have never had passenger rail service in the five-decade history of Amtrak.

In an email to supporters sent over the weekend, All Aboard Northwest President Dan Bilka said moving from a listing on a map to actual rail routes would require years of coordination and support from stakeholders in South Dakota.

Even so, he wrote, the maps are a sign that the rail administration has taken the advocacy of groups like All Aboard Northwest and its backers seriously. He quoted a passage of a blog post from Rail Passengers Association President Jim Mathews to make his point:

"The FRA team didn't just order out for pizza last month and sit in someone's basement to draw up a map with Magic Markers. Everyone involved knows that the next step is a broad, high-level assessment of capital needs, ridership, social and economic benefits, and stages of readiness."

The maps that include South Dakota are included in the summary materials produced after a third round of stakeholder meetings last year. Another round of meetings will commence this spring. After that round, the administration will submit a final report to Congress.

Bilka encouraged passenger rail backers to put pressure on South Dakota's congressional delegation to "help ensure that we're a national priority moving forward."

*John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.*

## **COMMENTARY**

### **Regret signing that petition? Republicans are here to 'help'**

**DANA HESS**

**FEBRUARY 19, 2024 7:00 AM**

Ever since the South Dakota Legislature dismantled the voter-approved anti-corruption measure known as IM 22 in record time, lawmakers and the people who back initiated measures have been locked in a battle of the ballot box. Lawmakers try to throw up as many roadblocks to ballot access as they can while ballot measure backers are intent on getting multiple issues in front of voters.

Through the years, Republicans in the Legislature have tried many tactics to make success tougher for ballot measures. Lawmakers keep busy with little things like boosting the font size to make the petition more unwieldy or increasing a copying fee to make the process more expensive. Sometimes they take on larger challenges like pushing back the effective date of ballot measures or enhancing the penalty for petition perjury.

While lawmakers keep tinkering with the rules governing ballot measures, citizens keep trying to use the public vote to change the state constitution or enact new laws. The secretary of state's website lists eight initiated measures and constitutional amendments that still have a chance to make it onto the 2024 ballot.

The latest attempt to mess with ballot measures comes in the form of a petition signature do-over. House Bill 1244 would create a process for withdrawing a signature from a petition for an initiated measure or constitutional amendment.

A Dakota Scout story quotes House Majority Leader Will Mortenson of Pierre as saying that the bill will add to voters' rights. According to Mortenson, they'll have the right to sign a petition and the right to withdraw that signature.

While the bill seems like just one more attempt to impede the ballot initiative process, the arguments from the bill's opponents are a little melodramatic. Matthew Schweich, chairman of the Voter Defense

Association of South Dakota, drew a comparison that gave signing a petition the same weight as actually casting a ballot.

"We don't let people submit a form to retract their form when they vote by mail," Schweich said, "and we shouldn't, because it undermines the importance of casting a vote. If people sign petitions, they should stick with that decision, just like when you vote."

With all due respect to Mr. Schweich, signing a petition and casting a ballot are two vastly different actions. Signing a petition doesn't necessarily serve as an endorsement of the initiated measure. All it does is endorse getting that measure on the ballot. Signing the petition is an important part of the process, but it is not akin to voting.

For their part, the bill's backers aren't really concerned with voters' rights. They're more concerned with keeping measures they don't agree with off the next ballot.

The process of getting signatures on the next batch of ballot measures has been particularly acrimonious. The bill's sponsor, Rep. Jon Hansen, a Dell Rapids Republican, says that voters are being misled and misinformed about ballot measures in order to get their signatures on petitions.

Hansen and his Republican colleagues aren't particularly fond of the current crop of initiated measures and constitutional amendments that could be on the 2024 ballot. These include attempts to establish abortion rights, cut the state sales tax on food, change the primary election system and legalize recreational marijuana.

The irony here is that lawmakers keep monkeying with the ballot measure rules while their own path to the ballot is remarkably easier. Lawmakers can put measures on the ballot just by convincing a majority of the 35-member Senate and a majority of the 70-member House that their idea is worthy of a vote of the people.

Citizens inspired to bring their ideas to a public vote face a far tougher task, collecting 17,508 signatures from registered voters for an initiated measure and 35,017 for a constitutional amendment.

Anyone who goes to that much effort shouldn't have their work second-guessed just because Republicans aren't fond of the next crop of ballot initiatives.

*Dana Hess spent more than 25 years in South Dakota journalism, editing newspapers in Redfield, Milbank and Pierre. He's retired and lives in Brookings, working occasionally as a freelance writer.*

## Admitted without an application: Pilot project aims to bolster state university enrollment

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - FEBRUARY 19, 2024 5:32 PM

The number of students graduating from South Dakota high schools is declining. And fewer of those graduates are enrolling in any higher education, let alone attending one of South Dakota's public universities.

Before an anticipated demographic shift makes the problem even worse, state officials are starting a pilot project to proactively admit high schoolers into college.

Universities across the country are expecting an enrollment decline called the "2025 cliff," largely attributed to a lower birth rate during the Great Recession of 2007-2009.

After that, there'll be a 10% decline in high school graduates from 2025 to 2037, South Dakota Board of Regents Executive Director Nathan Lukkes told lawmakers earlier this year. Enrollment at the state's universities is already down from a high of 36,662 in 2017 to 34,372 this year.

### Direct admissions pilot project

Starting in fall 2024, some South Dakota public universities plan to proactively admit high school juniors to select programs based on the students' transcript.

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Participating universities:

Black Hills State University

Northern State University

South Dakota State University

University of South Dakota

Participating school districts:

Sioux Falls School District

Aberdeen School District

Spearfish School District

That won't just have an impact on universities' bottom lines. It'll also impact the South Dakota workforce: fewer children, graduates and workers.

Exacerbating the problem is the drop in South Dakota high school graduates seeking higher education.

That number has steadily declined in recent years – from 67% enrollment in any postsecondary institution (including technical colleges) in 2018 to 63% in 2021, according to the most recent data available. The percentage of South Dakota high school graduates enrolled in an in-state public university dropped by four percentage points in that same timeframe.

There is growth in South Dakota child populations in some areas of the state, such as Sioux Falls and Rapid City. But the challenge, Lukkes told lawmakers, is that the growth is largely in diverse, low-income families without histories of college enrollment.

Some of those families might not be encouraging or suggesting their children attend higher education. They might not even consider it a possibility.

So, Lukkes said, the Board of Regents is fostering that conversation.

The state entity is partnering with three school districts to proactively admit high school juniors to some state universities based on the students' grades and curriculum.

"The hope is to get people who maybe didn't see higher education as a viable pathway to realize that they do have what it takes to be successful in higher education and to fuel our workforce in the state," Lukkes said.

The Board of Regents plans to inform some high school juniors this fall in Aberdeen, Sioux Falls and Spearfish that they've been proactively admitted into one or more universities or colleges. Specific admission criteria haven't been established yet, said Janice Minder, the regents' system vice president for academic policy and planning.

The participating state universities are Black Hills State, Northern State, South Dakota State and the University of South Dakota. Dakota State and South Dakota Mines won't participate, both to collect comparative data and because the schools' programs are more specialized than other institutions.

"It's not going to move the needle at those institutions to the extent it might for USD-Sioux Falls, Black Hills or Northern," Lukkes said.

The program is modeled after Idaho's direct admissions system, which has seen early success. Direct admissions increased first-time enrollments by 4-8% and in-state enrollments by 8-15%, according to a study published in the *Research in Higher Education* journal. However, the same study found the program had minimal to no impact on the enrollment of Pell Grant-eligible students, a federal need-based grant to low-income students.

Depending on the success of the pilot program, Lukkes hopes to roll the program out across the state.

Minder said the direct admissions notification alone won't improve enrollment rates. School districts and universities will have to focus more on services helping students adjust to higher education.

"Communication paired with wraparound services, such as guidance on navigating the admission process, filling out the financial aid application, and exploring scholarship opportunities, is vital for students as they imagine their future in higher education," Minder said in an emailed statement.

The direct admission program fits into a "critical part" of the Board of Regent's mission, Lukkes said, which is providing access to higher education pathways if students desire.

"We're not Harvard. We're not an elite institution," Lukkes said. "We try to create opportunities for all



students and we want to make sure that they have viable pathways to be successful if they choose to pursue their education beyond high school.”

*Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan whose work has won national and regional awards. She’s spent five years as a journalist with experience reporting on workforce, development and business issues within the state.*

## Green methanol: A carbon dioxide pipeline alternative?

**BY: JARED STRONG - FEBRUARY 19, 2024 5:00 PM**

A company that wants to help ethanol producers harness their carbon dioxide emissions to produce an additional renewable fuel says its technology is a viable alternative to proposed carbon dioxide pipelines.

CapCO2 Solutions is nearing completion of its first “green methanol” project at an ethanol plant in Illinois. The company hopes that a successful launch there this summer will lead ethanol producers in Iowa to follow suit.

“We think it’s a far more attractive solution for most ethanol plants than trying to ship (carbon dioxide) somewhere,” said Jeff Bonar, the company’s chief executive.

The carbon dioxide emissions of ethanol plants are relatively pure, which makes them economically attractive candidates for carbon capture. A handful of Iowa’s 42 ethanol refineries already capture their emissions and sell the gas for other commercial purposes.

Meantime, the federal government has created substantial tax incentives for capturing and sequestering carbon dioxide and for producing low-carbon fuels.

CapCO2 estimates that its “methanol modules” — pre-built shipping containers with the equipment to convert carbon dioxide into methanol — have the potential to reduce the carbon scores of the facilities’ ethanol by a similar amount as currently proposed carbon pipelines.

But rather than piping the greenhouse gas out of state for underground sequestration, it would be used to create a new product the facilities could sell.

Methanol is used to produce a variety of products — ranging from plastic to paint to insulation to cosmetics — and it also a potential source of renewable fuel. Because the fuel can have little or no sulfur, some shipping companies in recent years have considered using it to power their ocean vessels.

CapCO2’s modules cost about \$12 million apiece, Bonar said, and are created with technology licensed from a European company. Ethanol plants would use multiple modules depending on the amount of carbon dioxide available for conversion to methanol.

Bonar said it’s a less expensive alternative to traditional methanol production systems and with a much smaller footprint. He said ethanol producers might be able to recoup their up-front costs within a year.

“It’s a very cost-effective approach,” he said.

### **A new technology**

Whether green methanol — produced by CapCO2’s process or another company’s — is a viable alternative to the proposed pipeline systems is unclear. Some pipeline opponents have argued that methanol is a better option that allays their concerns about pipeline safety, damage to land for construction and the use of eminent domain to build them.

The leaders of several ethanol production facilities in Iowa who have considered methanol production did not respond to requests to comment for this article.

“People are interested in learning about it, but they don’t see it as a near-term solution,” said Monte Shaw, executive director of the Iowa Renewable Fuels Association, which advocates for the ethanol industry. “This is a new technology. You can’t really go anywhere in the world and see one of these plants operating.”

Shaw doesn’t rule out green methanol as a future product that might be produced from carbon dioxide captured at ethanol plants, but he said pipeline systems similar to what has been proposed by Summit Carbon Solutions offer a more immediate and proven way for those facilities to produce low-carbon fuels.

Summit is nearing the end of its hazardous liquid pipeline permit process in Iowa. It wants to build a

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five-state system that would connect to at least 25 of Iowa's ethanol facilities to transport carbon dioxide to North Dakota for underground storage, at a cost of more than \$5 billion.

Those ethanol producers would benefit from selling their fuels into low-carbon markets and would be eligible for generous federal tax credits, which in future years could expire. Summit has agreements with the plants to share the profits.

The company has said the system could be operational in 2026, barring further regulatory setbacks. North and South Dakota both rejected Summit's initial proposals. North Dakota is reconsidering, and the company has said it will reapply in South Dakota.

Bonar said it takes between one and two years for CapCO2 to install its systems. To qualify as green methanol, the ethanol producers would also need to power the equipment from a source that does not generate carbon dioxide emissions, such as wind turbines or solar panels.

Much of the electricity is used to make hydrogen — the other key ingredient to methanol besides carbon dioxide.

"Green methanol is so valuable that it can quickly pay for additional zero-carbon power construction," said Bonar, who estimated that the cost to install wind turbines near an ethanol plant might account for 10 or 15% of the total project cost.

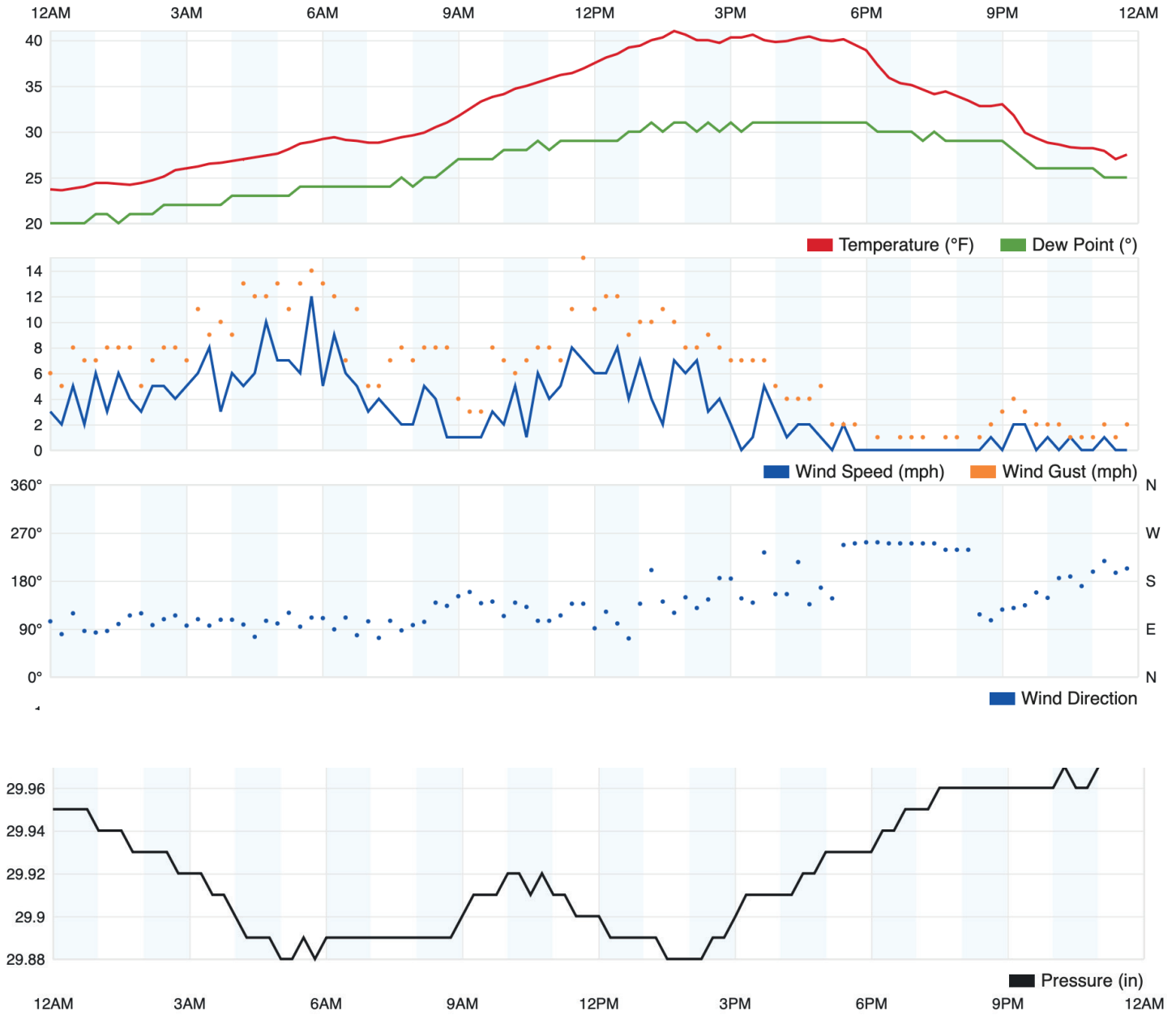
The Illinois plant that is the site of CapCO2's first project is using electricity generated by a nuclear power plant, of which Iowa has none.

*Jared Strong is the senior reporter for the Iowa Capital Dispatch. He has written about Iowans and the important issues that affect them for more than 15 years, previously for the Carroll Times Herald and the Des Moines Register. His investigative work exposing police misconduct has notched several state and national awards. He is a longtime trustee of the Iowa Freedom of Information Council, which fights for open records and open government. He is a lifelong Iowan and has lived mostly in rural western parts of the state.*

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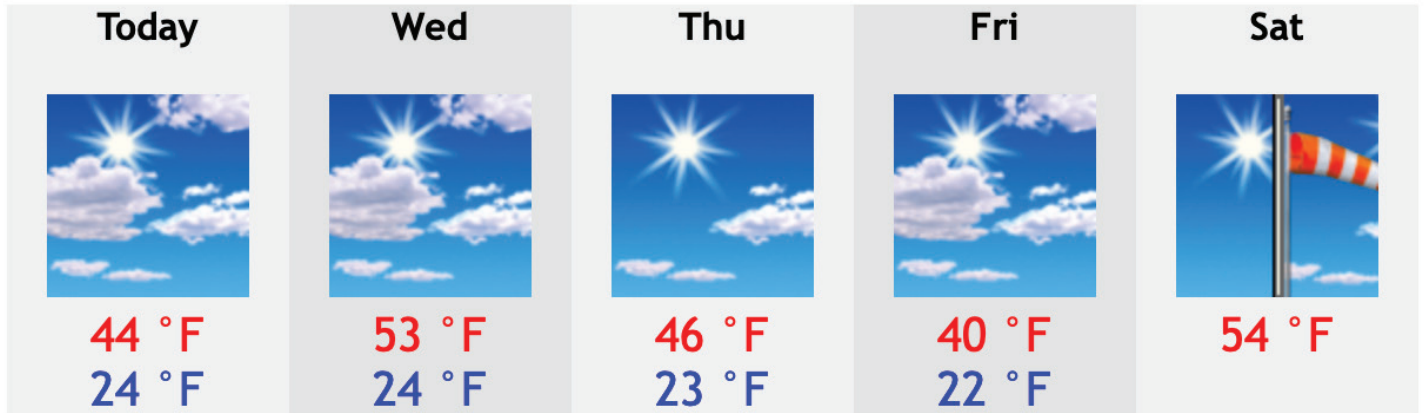
## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs





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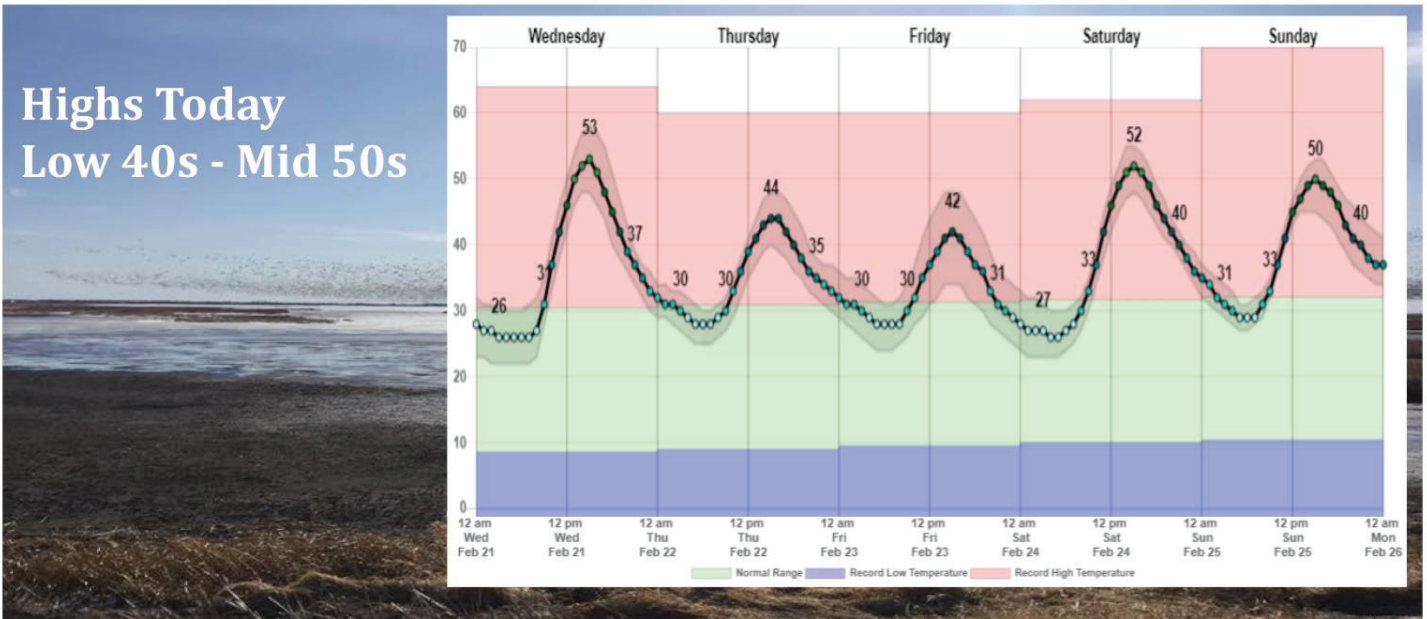
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## Continued Mild & Dry

February 20, 2024  
3:14 AM

### Next Several Days Temperature Trends

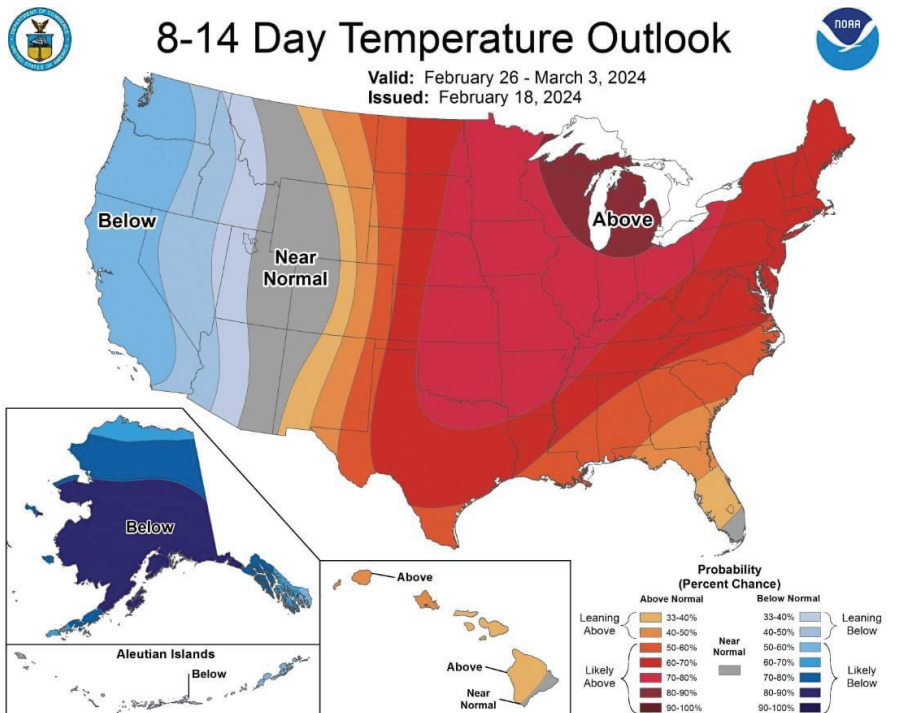
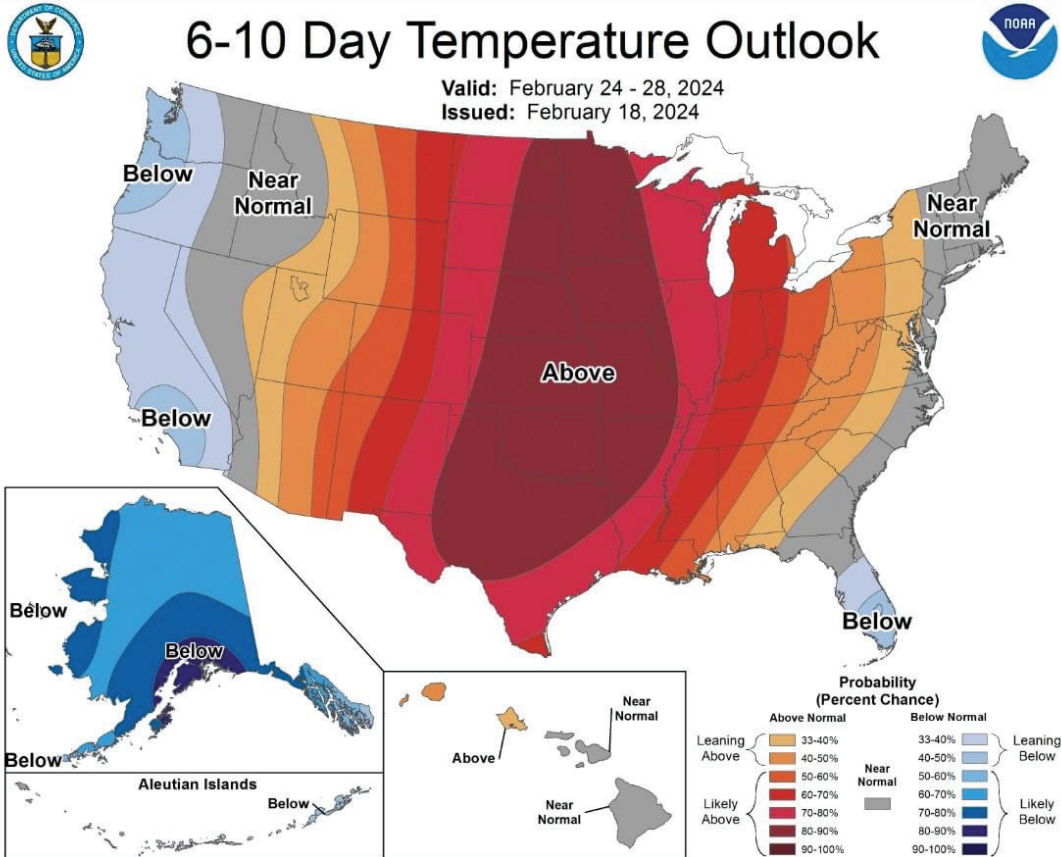


Temperatures will remain above average with dry conditions for the next several days

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Our climatological average highs for the end of February range in the lower to mid 30s, to the upper 30s around and west of the Missouri River. There is a 70-80% probability of warmer than average temperatures Saturday into next week and 60-70% for the end of February into early March! Sorry snow and winter lovers.





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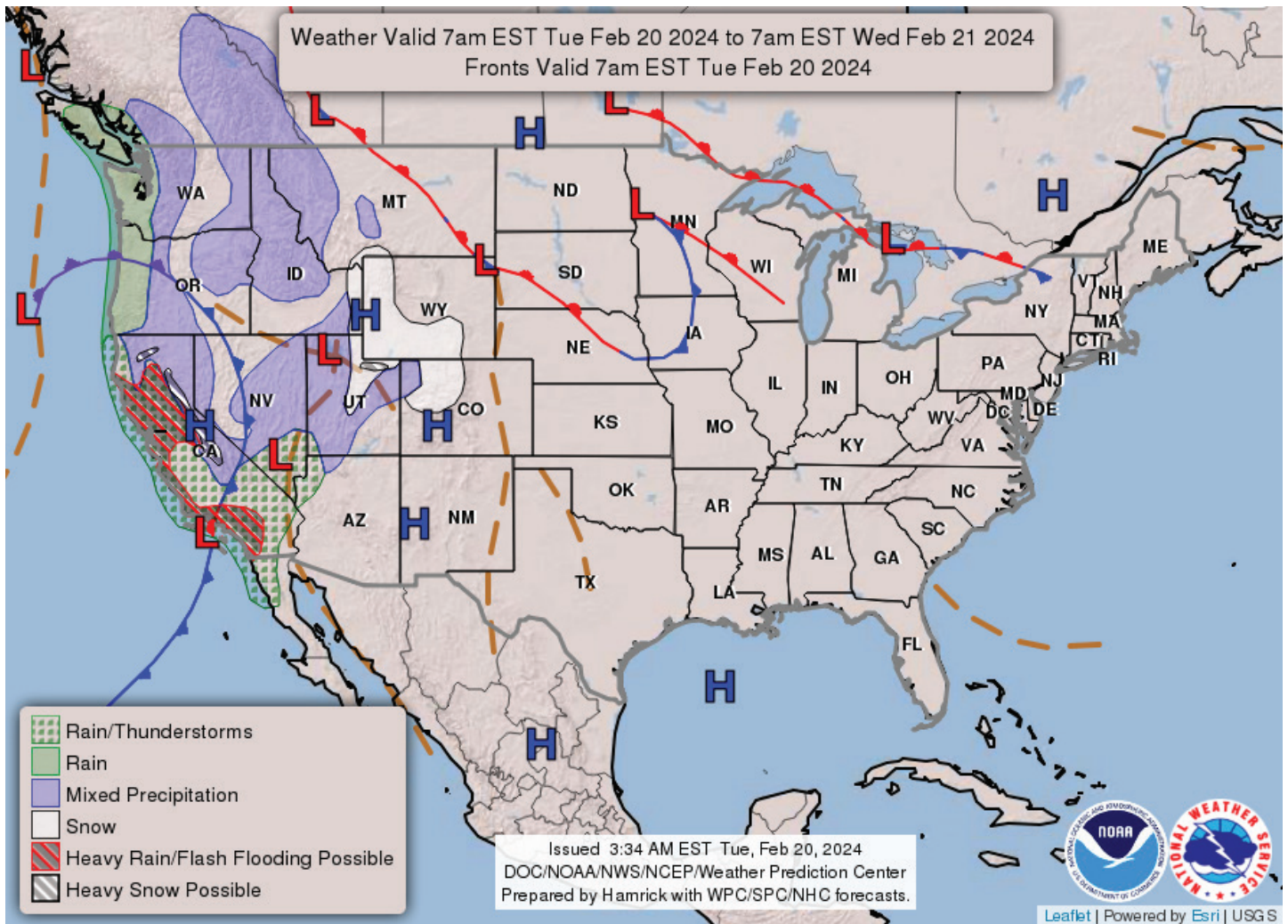
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 41 °F at 1:45 PM**  
**Low Temp: 24 °F at 12:14 AM**  
**Wind: 15 mph at 11:44 AM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 10 hours, 42 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 61 in 1930  
Record Low: -30 in 1918  
Average High: 30  
Average Low: 8  
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.42  
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.07  
Average Precip to date: 0.97  
Precip Year to Date: 0.07  
Sunset Tonight: 6:07:30 pm  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:23:04 am





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## Today in Weather History

February 20th, 1962 A round of heavy snow fell across the southeastern half of the state from the 20th through the 22nd, producing 10 inches. Snowfall amounts included 5 inches at Bryant, 6 inches at Kennebec, 7 inches at Redfield, Brookings, Mitchell, and Sioux Falls, 8 inches at Miller, and 10 inches at Huron. Snowfall amounts for the record-setting month of February 1962 ranged from 30 - 50 inches across much of the southeast part of the state.

February 20th, 1997 Warm weather resulted in snowmelt runoff and ice breakup on the Bad River. As a result, the Bad River went above flood stage from Capa to Fort Pierre late in the evening of the 20th. The flood stage at Fort Pierre is 21 feet, and the river rose to around 25 feet on the 21st. The Bad River went below flood stage during the afternoon of the 22nd. Lowlands near the river were flooded along with some county roads, with some of the roads damaged. Late in the evening of the 20th, the trailer court on the southern edge of Fort Pierre was evacuated, where they did some sandbagging. Also, on the west side of Fort Pierre, some roads were flooded.

February 20th, 2011 The snowfall/blizzard event on 20-21 February 2011 produced yet another round of impressive snowfall totals across central and northeastern South Dakota and west-central Minnesota. Storm total snowfall amounts ranged from 8" to 12" with locally higher amounts of more than 18" reported in a few locations.

1805 - The Potomac River was opened after being closed by ice for a period of two months. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1898 - Eastern Wisconsin experienced their biggest snowstorm of record. Racine received thirty inches, and drifts around Milwaukee measured fifteen feet high. (David Ludlum)

1912: A strong area of low pressure produced snow in Amarillo and high winds to Austin, Texas. In the warm sector of the low, severe storms developed and produced an estimated F3 tornado in Shreveport, Louisiana. The tornado killed nine people and injured 50 others. The tornado passed near Centenary College, where windows were damaged, and the grandstand at the ballpark was partially damaged. In addition, significant damage occurred in the Freewater section, where an estimated 75 to 100 houses were demolished.

1912: During the 20th and 21st, a severe snowstorm attended by high winds lasting from 34 to 30 hours swept over Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. The amount of snow that fell in this storm was not only large, but it drifted severely. In many places, snowbanks 5 feet and higher were formed, railroad cuts were filled, highways in many places were impassable, electric service wires of all kinds were temporarily put out of commission, all trade and traffic generally demoralized. This snowstorm was part of a general disturbance that developed over the southwest on the 20th and moved northeastward over the Central and Eastern States, increasing in strength during the 21st and 22nd, and which proved to be one of the most severe and most extensive general disturbances that have passed over this section of the country for several years past. Besides the heavy snow in the northern part of the storm, heavy rains, gales, and destructive thunderstorms attended over most of the southern and eastern portions. Wind velocities of 50 to 75 miles per hour were reported at many places during the passage of this storm. Some wind blew steadily at high velocities for several hours.

1953 - A snowstorm in Nebraska, South Dakota, Iowa and Minnesota produced drifts ten feet high which derailed trains. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A storm system over Arizona spread heavy snow from the Southern Rockies into the Southern Plains Region. Thunderstorms in central Texas produced golf ball size hail about the same time north central Texas was being blanketed with up to 8 inches of snow, closing many schools. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Snow and strong northerly winds ushered arctic air into the Great Lakes Region. The temperature at Sault Ste Marie MI plunged from 30 degrees at 5 AM to one below zero by 3 PM, with a wind chill reading of 40 degrees below zero. Five cities in Florida reported record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 90 degrees at Lakeland was just a degree shy of their February record. (The National Weather Summary)

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1989 - Thunderstorms developing during the early afternoon produced severe weather from eastern Texas to Alabama and northwest Florida. Thunderstorms spawned a dozen tornadoes during the afternoon and evening. Thunderstorms also produced 90 mph winds around Vicksburg MS, and 100 mph winds around Jackson MS. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Heavy snow spread into southwestern Kansas and the panhandle region of Oklahoma and Texas. Heavier snowfall totals included 12 inches at Boise City OK, 11 inches at Liberal KS, and 10 inches at Spearman TX. Blowing and drifting snow closed roads in the Oklahoma panhandle. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1995: The temperature at the Civic Center in Los Angeles, California, soared to 95 degrees, the highest ever recorded at the location during February.

2004: A nor'easter brought heavy snow and strong winds to Nova Scotia and Prince Edwards Island from February 17th through 20th, 2004. The Maritimers called this storm White Juan, a hurricane disguised as a blizzard. Halifax, Yarmouth, and Charlottetown broke all-time 24-hour snowfall records, receiving about 3 feet of snow. The 34.8 inches of snow on February 19th nearly doubled its previous record for a single day for Halifax.

Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### THE LIMITS OF TRUTH

It was a tense trial. The man who was facing severe charges needed someone to testify to his trustworthiness. One of his friends was called to the stand as a witness. He was asked, "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?"

He quietly responded, "Yes, I do."

The judge turned to him and asked, "Do you understand the meaning of that oath?"

"Yes, your Honor, I do," he replied. And then added, "But under those conditions, I don't have much to say."

What a thoughtful, cautious response. He had much that he could say, but he was clear about what he would not say. His mind was "full," but he chose to keep his mouth "empty."

Whatever we put into our minds eventually comes out of our mouths and is ultimately seen in our behavior. Paul advised us to "program" our minds to "Think about things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, admirable, and worthy of praise." What a challenge!

If we take Paul's advice seriously and pause to consider the importance of what we allow to enter our minds, we might be quite surprised. As people of "habits," we do things out of routines that have been established over the years. These routines define who we are. So...

Whatever we look at or read, think on or talk about, listen to and meditate on, will impact the way we behave. There is a predictable path: from head to heart to habit

Prayer: Heavenly Father, fill our minds with thoughts that come from Your Word that will draw us so close to You. Then we will speak words that are "worthy of praise." In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Philippians 4:8



We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.16.24

19 23 39 42 67 18

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$493,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 16 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.19.24

4 14 31 37 41 8

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$3,150,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 31 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.19.24

7 19 31 34 47 11

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 46 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.17.24

10 20 27 29 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$55,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 46 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.19.24

9 18 30 47 63 14

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 15 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.19.24

4 23 45 50 53 17

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$348,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 15 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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## News from the Associated Press

### Monday's Scores

The Associated Press

#### **GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL**

SDHSAA Playoffs=

Class A Region 2=

Clark-Willow Lake 35, Deuel 24

Class A Region 5=

Platte-Geddes 48, Kimball-White Lake 45

Class B Region 1=

Aberdeen Christian 43, Waverly-South Shore 25

Class B Region 2=

Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 75, Flandreau Indian 41

Class B Region 4=

Freeman Academy-Marion 31, Scotland 23

Class B Region 5=

Gregory 52, Colome 21

Class B Region 6=

Ipswich 44, Sunshine Bible Academy 32

Class B Region 7=

New Underwood 54, Crazy Horse 8

Class B Region 8=

Bison 32, McIntosh High School 27

Tiospaye Topa 88, Takini 13

#### **BOYS PREP BASKETBALL**

Aberdeen Christian 62, Little Wound 45

Baltic 87, Tri-Valley 72

Canistota 58, Hanson 53

Canton 74, Vermillion 70

Centerville 53, Mitchell Christian 41

Colman-Egan 89, Sioux Falls Lutheran 75

Corsica/Stickney 43, Parkston 36

Custer 68, Hill City 46

Dell Rapids 69, Garretson 33

Dell Rapids 74, Pipestone, Minn. 68

Elk Point-Jefferson 71, West Central 56

Faith 64, New Underwood 41

Flandreau 52, Deubrook 38

Great Plains Lutheran 51, North Central 29

Groton 71, Dakota Valley 54

Hot Springs 78, Oelrichs 26

Lemmon High School 64, Belle Fourche 47

Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud High School 60, Bennett County 51

McCook Central-Montrose 55, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 52

Milbank 65, Madison 58

Platte-Geddes 57, Todd County 37

Rapid City Christian 91, Lead-Deadwood 31  
Sioux Falls Christian 81, Marshall, Minn. 44  
St Thomas More 49, Rapid City Central 23  
Stanley County 63, Lyman 49  
Viborg-Hurley 76, Gayville-Volin High School 54  
Winner 69, Crow Creek Tribal School 51

Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

## Long after tragic mysteries are solved, families of Native American victims are kept in the dark

By SCOTT SONNER Associated Press

It was the winter of 2021 when Philbert Shorty's family found his abandoned car stuck in the mud outside the small community of Tsaille near the Arizona-New Mexico state line. "We knew something happened from the get-go," said his uncle, Ben Shorty. "We couldn't find any answers."

Family members reported the 44-year-old man missing. And for the next two years, they searched — hiking through remote canyons on the Navajo Nation, placing advertisements on the radio and posting across social media in hopes of unearthing any clues.

The efforts produced nothing. They had no way of knowing he'd been killed more than a week before they reported him missing.

They remained unaware even as U.S. prosecutors finalized a plea deal last summer with Shiloh Aaron Oldrock, who was charged in connection with Shorty's death as a result of a separate investigation into the killing and beheading of Oldrock's uncle. The 30-year-old Fargo, North Dakota, man told authorities his uncle had threatened to kill him during an alcohol-fueled fight that came eight months after the pair conspired to cover up Shorty's death by dismembering and burning his body on Jan. 29, 2021.

In both cases, Oldrock told investigators, a night of heavy drinking and fighting ended in death at his uncle's home near Navajo, New Mexico.

The details of this tale are more gruesome than most. Yet to those living in Indian Country, the elements underlying the tragedy are all too familiar. Generations of unaddressed trauma combine with substance abuse to create a dangerous recipe that often ends in violence, and law enforcement resources and social support programs are too sparse to offer much help.

DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES ARE GETTING NOTICED. WILL IT HELP?

Shorty's story is one of many across the United States and Canada, where high rates of missing persons and unsolved killings involving Indigenous people have captured the attention of policymakers at the highest levels.

In 2019, former President Donald Trump signed an executive order establishing a task force. Congress followed in 2020 by passing two key pieces of legislation aimed at addressing the crisis. U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, who had championed legislation as a congresswoman, has been working under the Biden administration to solve some of the systemic problems and jurisdictional challenges that have left victims' families feeling invisible.

The Interior Department is nearly three weeks passed a deadline for responding to a set of recommendations from a special commission that spent months traveling the country, speaking with family members, advocates and police officials about how best to tackle the epidemic.

Commission members heard hours of heartbreaking testimony from family members who have fought to keep their cases in the spotlight, often memorializing those lost with prayer vigils, special blankets and buttons, traditional ribbon skirts and red handprints painted on sidewalks and buildings.

Like others, Shorty's family now knows the suffering will linger despite the increased emphasis on solving such crimes.

Shorty's family "had been left in the dark about what happened," U.S. Attorney for the District of New

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Mexico Alexander Uballez acknowledged in a November sentencing memo that referred to Shorty by only his initials — PS. Wrote Uballez: “They are just beginning to grieve as they were only informed recently that PS was deceased, rather than missing.”

Uballez expressed hope that putting Oldrock behind bars would bring some closure, saying that Shorty’s elderly aunt could stop looking down the driveway in hopes her nephew might one day return.

Uballez said Oldrock’s convictions were part of the U.S. Justice Department’s duty to bring answers to tribal communities. While no amount of investigation or prosecution will bring back a loved one, he said, law enforcement partners will meet each case “with urgency, transparency and coordination.”

## PROMISES THAT MAY OR MAY NOT LEAD SOMEWHERE

That vow of transparency is what has Native American families frustrated. Many say authorities regularly fail to communicate about the status of pending cases. In Shorty’s case, unanswered questions about whether there were any remains recovered have left his family guessing as to whether they can ever have a burial for him.

“The investigators never called me. They were supposed to but never did,” Ben Shorty said in a recent interview. “It was all done behind closed doors.”

The FBI’s most recent list of missing people from the Navajo Nation still included Philbert Shorty. That’s despite investigators having had reason to believe he was dead as early as October 2021 with Oldrock’s confession. A medical investigator’s report issued the following spring said that while it couldn’t be confirmed conclusively, communications with law enforcement suggested that charred remains found at the home of Oldrock’s uncle likely were those of Shorty.

Darlene Gomez, an Albuquerque attorney, has represented dozens of Native American families. The handling of Shorty’s case doesn’t surprise her.

“The FBI does this all the time,” she said. “They don’t even talk to the family until there is an indictment. And very often they don’t say anything at all.”

While there is a need to keep confidential certain details as investigations move forward, federal authorities did not immediately respond to questions by The Associated Press about the process for sharing information with families and whether people were assigned to serve as liaisons to help families as cases move through the system.

The federal Not Invisible Act Commission devoted part of its 212-page report to related concerns and recommendations. The report references stories shared by families about difficulties in accessing police and autopsy reports: “Families are often kept waiting, not knowing if the person identified is their family member or not knowing the cause and circumstances of death nor how the body of their family member was handled.”

It all rings true for Bernadine Beyale, the daughter of retired Navajo police officers who founded the non-profit 4 Corners K-9 Search and Rescue in Farmington, New Mexico, in 2022. Her group has conducted dozens of individual searches, and she has helped to build bridges between families and law enforcement to help families avoid feeling like their cases are falling through cracks.

“Even if (law enforcement) would just talk to the families, say, ‘We don’t have anything yet but we’re still working on it,’ it would help,” she said.

## ‘I TRY TO BE AS TRANSPARENT AS POSSIBLE’

Records obtained by the AP show that a witness gave a ride to Oldrock in October 2021. He had cuts on his face and blood on his hands and clothes. He told the driver he had just killed his uncle, identified as Erwin Beach. He said he believed Beach had killed his grandmother a year earlier and was going to kill him, too.

Oldrock told the FBI he stabbed Beach repeatedly after Beach swung an axe at him during a drunken fight. Oldrock said the chain of violent events that October day began much the same way as when Shorty was killed months earlier — with heavy drinking. Oldrock was sentenced in November to 35 years in prison for second-degree murder in the killing of Beach and involuntary manslaughter in Shorty’s death.

Whether details are unveiled through court documents or they come from investigators in the field, Beyale



acknowledges it can be difficult to decide how to share information with victims' families.

"If we find a body or remains, I don't give a lot of details," she said. "But I try to be as transparent as possible and tell them we don't have a positive ID but we found remains in this area."

Beyale tries to persuade families who want to conduct their own search to let her do it instead. "I always ask them if they are not only physically ready to do a search like that, but also mentally ready to find something," she said. "They always say, 'Yeah, yeah.' But they are not. I've not found one family that was mentally ready."

Shorty's family still hopes to have a funeral. They're ready for closure but are — still — waiting on investigators.

"What are we supposed to bury? Just nothing? At least some ashes or something," Ben Shorty said. "We got nothing still."

## **Biden heads to California to rev up his fundraising in anticipation of costly rematch with Trump**

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden heads to California on Tuesday looking to soak up more cash for his reelection bid during a three-day swing through the state.

Going into the trip, Biden's campaign and the Democratic National Committee announced Tuesday that they had collected \$42 million in contributions during January from 422,000 donors. Biden ended January with \$130 million in cash on hand. Campaign officials said that is the highest total amassed by any Democratic candidate at this point in the cycle.

Biden campaign manager Julie Chavez Rodriguez called the haul "an indisputable show of strength to start the election year."

"While Team Biden-Harris continues to build on its fundraising machine, Republicans are divided — either spending money fighting Donald Trump, or spending money in support of Donald Trump's extreme and losing agenda," she said.

The campaign will need to keep on fundraising for what is expected to be a hotly contested and expensive battle with former President Trump, who has emerged as the GOP's likely nominee.

This week's trip to Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area will mark Biden's third visit to Southern California in just over two months for political events. He's trying to make up for lost time after largely avoiding the Democratic donor stronghold during last year's strikes by the Writers Guild of America and SAG-AFTRA.

Biden heads first to Los Angeles, where he will take part in a fundraiser. He'll also make campaign stops in San Francisco and Los Altos Hills this week and deliver a policy speech near Los Angeles on Wednesday.

Biden made a quick visit to Los Angeles earlier this month for a meeting with supporters in the city's upscale Bel Air neighborhood. He and first lady Jill Biden also spent a weekend in December in the Los Angeles area for campaign events.

The first lady is traveling Tuesday to Guilford, Connecticut, to hold a campaign fundraiser on behalf of her husband.

While the Bidens will be pursuing deep-pocketed donors this week, the campaign points to the number of smaller donations it has raised as an encouraging sign for the president.

The campaign says 97% of the 3 million donations it has received thus far were under \$200 each. Biden has also received pledges from 158,000 "sustaining donors" who have committed to donating on a monthly basis — more than double the amount Biden had at this point in the 2020 cycle.

Those totals include donations to Biden's political operation and to a network of joint fundraising arrangements with the national and state Democratic parties. Biden's 2020 campaign raised over \$1 billion, and could need even more in a likely Trump rematch.

"This haul will go directly to reaching the voters who will decide this election," said Biden campaign senior communications adviser TJ Ducklo.

Biden in recent days has seized on comments by Trump that call into question the U.S. commitment to defend NATO allies from attack as “dangerous” and “un-American.” Trump earlier this month said he once warned that he would allow Russia to do whatever it wants to NATO member nations that are “delinquent” in devoting 2% of their gross domestic product to defense.

The Biden campaign launched digital ads last week in three battleground states — Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania — criticizing Trump for his threat to NATO countries. Biden has also railed against House Republicans for blocking a \$95 billion foreign aid bill that includes \$60 billion in funding for Ukraine’s war with Russia.

“The idea that we’re going to walk away from Ukraine, the idea that we’re going to let NATO begin to split is totally against the interests of the United States of America and it is against our word we’ve given ... all the way back to Eisenhower,” Biden told reporters Sunday.

## **WikiLeaks founder Assange starts final UK legal battle to avoid extradition to US on spy charges**

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Julian Assange’s lawyers will begin their final U.K. legal challenge on Tuesday to stop the WikiLeaks founder from being sent to the United States to face spying charges.

The 52-year-old has been fighting extradition for more than a decade, including seven years in self-exile in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London and the last five years in a high-security prison.

Dozens of supporters holding “Free Julian Assange” signs and chanting “there is only one decision – no extradition” held a noisy protest outside the High Court in London, where Assange’s attorneys will ask two High Court judges to grant a new appeal hearing, his last legal roll of the dice in Britain.

If the judges rule against Assange, he can ask the European Court of Human Rights to block his extradition — though supporters worry he could be put on a plane to the U.S. before that happens.

Supporters plan to demonstrate outside the neo-Gothic court building on both days and march to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak’s Downing Street office at the end of the hearing.

Judges Victoria Sharp and Jeremy Johnson could deliver a verdict at the end of the two-day hearing on Wednesday, but they’re more likely to take several weeks to consider their decision.

“This hearing marks the beginning of the end of the extradition case, as any grounds rejected by these judges cannot be further appealed in the U.K. – bringing Assange dangerously close to extradition,” the press freedom group Reporters Without Borders said.

Assange, an Australian citizen, has been indicted on 17 charges of espionage and one charge of computer misuse over his website’s publication of classified U.S. documents. U.S. prosecutors say he helped U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning steal diplomatic cables and military files that WikiLeaks later published, putting lives at risk.

To his supporters, Assange is a secrecy-busting journalist who exposed U.S. military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan and is entitled to First Amendment protections. They argue that the prosecution is politically motivated and he won’t get a fair trial in the U.S.

His wife Stella Assange — a lawyer whom he married in prison in 2022 — says his health has deteriorated during years of confinement.

“His health is in decline, mentally and physically. His life is at risk every single day he stays in prison, and if he’s extradited, he will die,” she told reporters last week.

Assange’s legal troubles began in 2010, when he was arrested in London at the request of Sweden, which wanted to question him about allegations of rape and sexual assault made by two women. In 2012, Assange jumped bail and sought refuge inside the Ecuadorian Embassy, where he was beyond the reach of U.K. and Swedish authorities — but was also effectively a prisoner in the tiny diplomatic mission.

The relationship between Assange and his hosts eventually soured, and he was evicted from the embassy in April 2019. British police immediately arrested him for breaching bail in 2012. He has been held in

London's Belmarsh Prison throughout his extradition battle. Sweden dropped the sex crimes investigations in November 2019 because so much time had elapsed.

Assange's lawyers say he could face up to 175 years in prison if convicted, though American authorities have said the sentence is likely to be much shorter than that.

A U.K. district court judge rejected the U.S. extradition request in 2021 on the grounds that Assange was likely to kill himself if held under harsh U.S. prison conditions. Higher courts overturned that decision after getting assurances from the U.S. about his treatment. The British government signed an extradition order in June 2022.

Meanwhile, the Australian parliament last week called for Assange to be allowed to return to his homeland. "Regardless of where people stand, this thing cannot just go on and on and on indefinitely," Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said.

## Israel orders new evacuations in northern Gaza, where UN says 1 in 6 children are malnourished

By WAFAA SHURAF and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel ordered new evacuations from parts of Gaza City on Tuesday, as a study led by the U.N. children's agency found that one in six children are acutely malnourished in the isolated and largely devastated north of the territory, where the city is located.

The report finds deepening misery across the territory, where Israel's air and ground offensive, launched in response to Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, has killed over 29,000 Palestinians, obliterated entire neighborhoods and displaced more than 80% of the population.

Israel has vowed to expand the offensive to the Gaza Strip's southernmost city of Rafah, where more than half of the territory's population of 2.3 million has sought refuge from fighting elsewhere. Many have crowded into sprawling tent camps and overflowing U.N.-run shelters near the Egyptian border.

The United States, Israel's top ally, has been working with mediators Egypt and Qatar to try to broker another cease-fire and hostage release agreement. Hamas' top political leader Ismail Haniyeh was in Cairo to meet with Egyptian officials on Tuesday, but there was no expectation of a breakthrough.

The Israeli military meanwhile ordered the evacuation of the Zaytoun and Turkoman neighborhoods on the southern edge of Gaza City, an indication that Palestinian militants are still putting up stiff resistance in areas of northern Gaza that the Israeli military said had been largely cleared weeks ago.

Residents said there have been airstrikes and heavy ground fighting in eastern parts of Gaza City over the past two days. "The situation is very difficult," said Ayman Abu Awad, who lives in Zaytoun. "We are trapped inside our homes."

### A POTENTIAL 'EXPLOSION' OF PREVENTABLE CHILD DEATHS

The report by the Global Nutrition Cluster, an aid partnership led by UNICEF, says more than 90% of children under 5 in Gaza eat two or fewer food groups a day, known as severe food poverty. A similar percentage are affected by infectious diseases, with 70% experiencing diarrhea in the last two weeks.

More than 80% of homes lack clean and safe water, with the average household having one liter (quart) per person per day, according to the report released Monday.

In Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah, where most humanitarian aid enters, the acute malnutrition rate is 5%, compared to 15% in northern Gaza, which has been isolated by the Israeli military and largely cut off from aid for months. Before the war the rate across Gaza was less than 1%, the report said.

"The Gaza Strip is poised to witness an explosion in preventable child deaths, which would compound the already unbearable level of child deaths in Gaza," UNICEF official Ted Chaiban said in a statement.

A U.N. report in December found that Gaza's entire population of 2.3 million Palestinians is in a food crisis, with a quarter of the population facing starvation.

Israel says it does not restrict the import of humanitarian supplies, but aid groups say delivery within Gaza has been severely hampered by Israeli road closures, ongoing fighting and the breakdown of law and order as Israeli strikes have targeted the Hamas-run police force.

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The U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, the main provider of aid in Gaza, said earlier this month that Israel was holding up a food shipment that could feed over a million people. Israel accused 12 employees of the agency of taking part in the Oct. 7 attack, without providing evidence. That led the United States and other major donors to freeze vital funding for the agency, even after it fired the workers and launched an independent investigation.

## NO END IN SIGHT TO MONTHSLONG WAR

The war began when Hamas-led militants burst through Israel's formidable border defenses and rampaged across communities in southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 hostage. The militants are still holding some 130 captives, around a fourth of whom are believed to be dead, after most of the rest were released in a prisoner-hostage exchange last year.

Israel responded to the attack with one of the deadliest and most destructive military campaigns in recent history in the tiny coastal enclave, which has been under an Israeli and Egyptian blockade since Hamas seized power from rival Palestinian forces in 2007.

Gaza's Health Ministry says the Palestinian death toll had risen to 29,092 since the start of the war, with around two-thirds of the fatalities being women and children. More than 69,000 Palestinians have been wounded, overwhelming the territory's hospitals, less than half of which are even partially functioning. The ministry does not distinguish between civilian and combatant casualties in its count.

Israel says it has killed over 10,000 Palestinian militants but has provided no evidence for its count. The military says it tries to avoid harming civilians and blames the high civilian death toll on Hamas because the militant group fights in dense residential neighborhoods. The military says 237 of its soldiers have been killed since the start of the ground offensive in late October.

## Live updates | US is set to veto a UN cease-fire resolution

By The Associated Press undefined

One in six children are acutely malnourished in the isolated and largely devastated northern Gaza, according to a UNICEF study, while Israel has vowed to expand its five-month offensive against Hamas to the enclave's southernmost city of Rafah.

The report by the Global Nutrition Cluster says more than 90% of children under 5 in Gaza eat two or fewer food groups a day, known as severe food poverty. A similar percentage are affected by infectious diseases, with 70% experiencing diarrhea in the last two weeks. More than 80% of homes lack clean and safe water, with the average household having one liter (quart) per person per day.

The U.N. Security Council is set to vote on a U.N. resolution demanding an immediate cease-fire on Tuesday, but the U.S. said it would veto it because it's trying to arrange a deal on its own that would bring a truce and the release of hostages held by Hamas.

The number of Palestinians killed during the war in Gaza has surpassed 29,000, according to the Health Ministry in Gaza, which does not distinguish between civilian and combatant casualties in its count. A quarter of Gaza's residents are starving. About 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed and around 250 abducted in Hamas' attack on Israel on Oct. 7 that sparked the war.

Currently:

- Israel orders new evacuations in northern Gaza, where UN says 1 in 6 children are malnourished.
- The UN Security Council is voting on a Gaza cease-fire on Tuesday, with the US certain to veto.
- Israel says Brazil's president unwelcome until he apologizes for comparing Gaza war to Holocaust.
- Find more of AP's coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>.

Here's the latest:

### US CERTAIN TO VETO A NEW UN CEASE-FIRE RESOLUTION

UNITED NATIONS — Arab nations are putting to a vote a U.N. resolution demanding an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza, knowing it will be vetoed by the United States but hoping to show broad global support for ending the Israel-Hamas war.

The Security Council scheduled the vote on the resolution at 10 a.m. EST (1500 GMT) Tuesday.



U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield says the Biden administration will veto the Arab-backed resolution because it may interfere with ongoing U.S. efforts to arrange a deal between the warring parties that would bring at least a six-week halt to hostilities and release all hostages taken during Hamas' surprise Oct. 7 attack in southern Israel.

In a surprise move ahead of the vote, the United States circulated a rival U.N. Security Council resolution that would support a temporary cease-fire in Gaza linked to the release of all hostages, and call for the lifting of all restrictions on the delivery of humanitarian aid.

Both of these actions "would help to create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities," the draft resolution obtained by The Associated Press says.

## Ship attacks and downing US drones. Yemen's Houthis still put up a fight despite US-led airstrikes

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Despite a month of U.S.-led airstrikes, Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels remain capable of launching significant attacks — just this week, they seriously damaged a ship in a crucial strait and apparently downed an American drone worth tens of millions of dollars.

The continued assaults by the Houthis on shipping through the crucial Red Sea corridor — the Bab el-Mandeb Strait — against the backdrop of Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip underscore the challenges in trying to stop the guerrilla-style attacks that have seen them hold onto Yemen's capital and much of the war-ravaged country's north since 2014.

Meanwhile, the campaign has boosted the rebels' standing in the Arab world, despite their own human rights abuses in a yearslong stalemated war with several of America's allies in the region. And the longer their attacks go on, analysts warn the greater the risk that disruptions to international shipping will begin to weigh down on the global economy.

On Monday, both the Houthis and Western officials acknowledged one of the most-serious attacks on shipping launched by the rebels. The Houthis targeted the Belize-flagged bulk carrier Rubymar with two anti-ship ballistic missiles, one of which struck the vessel, the U.S. military's Central Command said.

The Rubymar, which already had reported problems with its propulsion back in November, apparently became inoperable, forcing her crew to abandon the vessel.

Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree claimed on Monday night that the Rubymar sank, though there was no immediate independent confirmation of that. But even if it was still afloat, the attack marked one of only a few direct, serious hits by the Houthi rebels on shipping. In late January, another direct hit by the Houthis set a Marshall Islands-flagged tanker ablaze for hours.

Meanwhile, the Houthis early on Tuesday released footage of what they described as a surface-to-air missile bringing down a U.S. MQ-9 Reaper drone off the coast of Hodeida, a Yemeni port city held by the Houthis on the Red Sea. The footage also included video of men dragging pieces of debris from the water onto a beach.

Images of the debris, which included writing in English and what appeared to be electrical equipment, appeared to correspond to known pieces of the Reaper, which can be used in both attack missions and surveillance flights. Central Command and the U.S. Air Force's Mideast arm have not responded to questions from The Associated Press over the apparent downing.

In November, the Pentagon acknowledged the loss of an MQ-9, also shot down by the rebels over the Red Sea.

Since Yemen's Houthi rebels seized the country's north and its capital of Sanaa in 2014, the U.S. military has lost at least four drones to shootdowns by the rebels — in 2017, 2019 and this year.

Meanwhile, the Houthis also claimed an attack on the Sea Champion, a Greek-flagged, U.S.-owned bulk carrier bound for Aden, Yemen, carrying grain from Argentina.

The Houthis separately claimed an attack on the Marshall Islands-flagged bulk carrier Navis Fortuna as well, a ship that had been broadcasting its destination as Italy with an "all Chinese" crew to avoid being

targeted. Private security firm Ambrey reported that the vessel sustained minor damage in a drone attack

Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea and surrounding waters over Israel's war targeting Hamas in the Gaza Strip. They have frequently targeted vessels with tenuous or no clear links to Israel, imperiling shipping in a key route for trade among Asia, the Mideast and Europe. Those vessels have included at least one with cargo for Iran, its main benefactor.

So far, no U.S. sailor or pilot has been wounded by the Houthis since America launched its series of airstrikes targeting the rebels back in January. However, the U.S. continues to lose drones worth tens of millions of dollars and fire off million-dollar cruise missiles to counter the Houthis, who are using far-cheaper weapons that experts believe largely have been supplied by Iran to wage an asymmetrical battle on the seas.

Based off U.S. military's statements, American and allied forces have destroyed at least 73 missiles of different types before they were launched, as well as 17 drones, 13 bomb-laden drone boats and one underwater explosive drone over their monthlong campaign, according to an AP tally. Those figures don't include the initial Jan. 11 joint U.S.-U.K. strikes that began the campaign. The American military also has shot down dozens of missiles and drones already airborne as well since November.

The Houthis themselves haven't offered much information regarding their own losses, though they've acknowledged at least 22 of their fighters have been killed in the American-led strikes. Insurgent forces including the Houthis and allied tribes in Yemen number around 20,000 fighters, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies. They can operate in small units away from military bases, making targeting them more difficult than a traditional military force.

For the Houthis, they may view the costs as balanced by their sudden fame within an Arab world enraged by the killing of women and civilians by Israel in the Gaza Strip amid its war on Hamas.

In the past, others — including the late Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden — have used the Palestinians' plight to justify their "actions and garner support," wrote Fatima Abo Alasrar, a scholar at the Washington-based Middle East Institute.

"It legitimizes the Houthis' actions in the eyes of those who sympathize with the Palestinian cause, distracts from the more immediate issues associated with the Yemen conflict and the failures of Houthi governance, and potentially broadens the base of their support beyond Yemen's borders," Alasrar added.

But if the Houthi attacks continue, it could force the U.S. to intensify and widen its counterattacks across an already-volatile Mideast.

"Without a cease-fire in Gaza, the Houthis could be tempted to further escalate against U.S. interests in the Red Sea and in the region," wrote Eleonora Ardemagni, a fellow at the Italian Institute for International Political Studies.

For Washington, "deterrence options" are getting narrower, she added.

## **Indian farmers reject government offer and say they will carry on marching to New Delhi**

NEW DELHI (AP) — Indian farmers who have been protesting for a week to demand guaranteed crop prices have rejected a proposal from the government, and say they will continue their march to the capital New Delhi.

The protesting farmers began their march last week, but their efforts to reach the city have been blocked by authorities, who have barricaded highways into the capital with cement blocks, metal containers, barbed wire and iron spikes to barricade highways to the capital to avoid a repeat of the 2021 farmers' protests, during which they camped in the city's outskirts for over a year.

The farmers are seeking a law that would guarantee minimum prices for 23 crops. Late Monday night, farm leaders said they refused the government's offer of a five-year contract for guaranteed prices for five crops, including pulses, maize and cotton.

The government's proposal made Sunday was "not in the interest of farmers," Jagjit Singh Dallewal, one

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of the leaders of the protest, told the Press Trust of India news agency.

He added that the farmers — tens of thousands of whom have been camping out some 200 kilometers (120 miles) from the capital as they waited for the government offer — will resume their march to New Delhi on Wednesday.

“We appeal to the government to either resolve our issues or remove barricades and allow us to proceed to Delhi to protest peacefully,” Dallewal said.

The protests renewed a movement that began over two years ago, in which tens of thousands of farmers hunkered down on the edges of New Delhi for over a year against agriculture laws which the government ended up repealing.

This time, farmers who rode on tractors from neighboring Haryana and Punjab states say the government has failed to make progress on other key demands from the previous protests.

At the heart of the latest protests is the demand for a law that would guarantee minimum prices for their produce.

The government protects agricultural producers against sharp falls in farm prices by setting a minimum purchase price for certain essential crops, a system that was introduced in the 1960s to help shore up food reserves and prevent shortages. The system can apply to 23 crops, but the government usually offers the minimum price only for rice and wheat.

The farmers say guaranteed minimum support price for all 23 crops would stabilize their incomes. They are also pressing the government to follow through on promises to double their income, waive loans and withdraw legal cases brought against them during the earlier 2021 protests.

Several meetings between farm leaders and the government have failed to end the deadlock. Piyush Goyal, one of the ministers negotiating with the farmers, told PTI that some of the demands of the farmers were “deep and policy-driven,” which made it more difficult to find a resolution.

The protests come at a crucial time for India, where national elections are expected in the coming months and Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s party is widely expected to secure a third successive term.

Farmers are particularly important to Modi’s base. Northern Haryana and a few other states with substantial farmer populations are ruled by his Bharatiya Janata Party.

## Ukraine premier in Tokyo says his country needs missiles, but expects new US aid to come through

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said on Tuesday that his country needs long-range missiles and other ammunition to end Russia’s invasion, and said he expects a U.S. aid package that’s stalled in Congress to come through, speaking at a news conference the day after he attended a conference in Tokyo on reconstructing Ukraine.

Ukraine has modern equipment, training soldiers and fighting at NATO standards and that “European countries and the United States are supporting us, absolutely,” Shmyhal said.

But, he said, the country needs more long-range missiles for air defense against Russia on the frontline, Shmyhal said.

“Unfortunately, now they prevail in the air and unfortunately this leads to some consequences from the frontline, but I should say that we have no refuses from our partners to supply military equipment to Ukraine,” he said.

In many western countries, military support for Ukraine is facing pushback over growing costs as the war approaches the two-year mark.

The United States has provided Ukraine with about \$111 billion, largely in weapons but also equipment and humanitarian assistance, and a new aid package of \$95 billion is stalled in Congress after passing the Senate.

When Ukraine begins fielding F-16 fighter jets later this year, “we will balance the situation on the battlefield and it will be much easier for us,” he said. But currently, with the ongoing shortage of long-range

artillery and missile equipment, "if it will be stopped, if it will be delayed, this is the main danger for us on the battlefield."

The U.S. National Guard has it is continuing to train Ukrainian pilots on the jets despite the end of funding for other military aid efforts.

Japan hopes to build momentum for global support for Ukraine as the war drags on and attention has been diverted to the conflict in Gaza. Japan has focused on reconstruction aid, in part due to constitutional restraints on providing lethal weapons.

The previous day, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida vowed a long-term commitment to Ukraine's reconstruction at the Japan-Ukraine Conference for Promotion of Economic Growth and Reconstruction.

About 300 people and 130 companies from the two countries attended the conference, and more than 50 deals were signed, including a Japanese pledge of 15.8 billion yen (\$105 million) in new aid for Ukraine to fund demining and other urgently needed reconstruction projects in the energy and transportation sectors, according to the Japanese Foreign Ministry.

Shmyhal said Ukraine understands Japan's restrictions on weapons export policy and welcomed Japan's commitment.

Wrapping up his three-day visit amid tight security, Shmyhal was to visit a Nissan Motor Co. factory near Tokyo before leaving Japan later Tuesday.

## **Building collapse in Beirut suburb kills 4 and rescuers are searching for others**

BEIRUT (AP) — A building collapsed in a southern suburb of Beirut late Monday, killing four people and injuring three others as rescuers searched for more people under the rubble, a paramedic official said.

The building in the suburb of Choueifat crumbled after days of heavy rain. Local officials said the four-story building was not considered safe and the municipality had ordered it evacuated two years ago out of concerns its foundation was weak. Despite the order, the owner of the building rented apartments to Syrian families.

Most of the people living in the building are Syrian citizens, according to Raja Zreik of the Islamic Health Society that was taking part in rescue operations. He said four people were killed.

State-run National News Agency also reported two women, a man and a child were killed.

Zreik told The Associated Press that two women and a boy were pulled out from under the rubble and rushed to a hospital.

A member of the Lebanese Red Cross told the local Al-Jadeed TV at the scene that 17 people are still believed to be under the rubble.

Lebanon hosts some 805,000 United Nations-registered Syrian refugees, but officials estimate the actual number is far higher: between 1.5 million and 2 million.

## **The UN Security Council is voting on a Gaza cease-fire on Tuesday, with the US certain to veto**

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Arab nations are putting to a vote a U.N. resolution demanding an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza, knowing it will be vetoed by the United States but hoping to show broad global support for ending the Israel-Hamas war.

The Security Council scheduled the vote on the resolution at 10 a.m. EST (1500 GMT) Tuesday. U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield says the Biden administration will veto the Arab-backed resolution because it may interfere with ongoing U.S. efforts to arrange a deal between the warring parties that would bring at least a six-week halt to hostilities and release all hostages taken during Hamas' surprise Oct. 7 attack in southern Israel.



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In a surprise move ahead of the vote, the United States circulated a rival U.N. Security Council resolution that would support a temporary cease-fire in Gaza linked to the release of all hostages, and call for the lifting of all restrictions on the delivery of humanitarian aid. Both of these actions "would help to create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities," the draft resolution obtained by The Associated Press says.

U.S. deputy ambassador Robert Wood told several reporters Monday that the Arab-backed resolution is not "an effective mechanism for trying to do the three things that we want to see happen — which is get hostages out, more aid in, and a lengthy pause to this conflict."

With the U.S. draft, "what we're looking at is another possible option, and we'll be discussing this with friends going forward," Wood said. "I don't think you can expect anything to happen tomorrow."

A senior U.S. official said later Monday that "We don't believe in a rush to a vote." The official, speaking on condition of anonymity ahead of council discussions on the U.S. draft, said, "We intend to engage in the coming days in intensive negotiation around it. ... That's why we're not putting a timeline on a vote, but we do recognize the urgency of the situation."

Arab nations, supported by many of the 193 U.N. member countries, have been demanding a cease-fire for months as Israel's military offensive has intensified in response to the Hamas attack that killed 1,200 people and saw some 250 others taken hostage. The number of Palestinians killed has surpassed 29,000, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants but says the majority are women and children.

Tunisia's U.N. Ambassador Tarek Ladeb, this month's chair of the 22-nation Arab Group, told U.N. reporters last Wednesday that a cease-fire is urgently needed.

He pointed to some 1.5 million Palestinians who sought safety in Gaza's southern city of Rafah and face a "catastrophic scenario" if Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu goes ahead with his announced plan to evacuate civilians from the city and move Israel's military offensive to the area bordering Egypt where Israel says Hamas fighters are hiding.

In addition to a cease-fire now, the Arab-backed draft resolution demands the immediate release of all hostages, rejects the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians, calls for unhindered humanitarian access throughout Gaza, and reiterates council demands that Israel and Hamas "scrupulously comply" with international law, especially the protection of civilians. Without naming either party, it condemns "all acts of terrorism"

In a tough message to Israel, the U.S. draft resolution says Israel's planned major ground offensive in Rafah "should not proceed under current circumstances." And it warns that further displacement of civilians, "including potentially into neighboring countries," a reference to Egypt, would have serious implications for regional peace and security.

Thomas-Greenfield, in a statement Sunday, explained that the United States has been working on a hostage deal for months. She said U.S. President Joe Biden has had multiple calls over the last week with Netanyahu and the leaders of Egypt and Qatar to push the deal forward.

"Though gaps remain, the key elements are on the table," she said, and the deal remains the best opportunity to free the hostages and have a sustained pause that would enable lifesaving aid to get to needy Palestinians.

The 15 Security Council members have been negotiating on the Arab-backed resolution for three weeks. Algeria, the Arab representative on the council, delayed a vote at U.S. request while U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was recently in the region, hoping to get a hostage deal. But Qatar said Saturday the talks "have not been progressing as expected." And the Arab Group decided over the weekend that they had given the U.S. enough time and put their resolution in final form for a vote.

What will happen after the U.S. casts its veto remains to be seen. The Arab Group could take their resolution to the U.N. General Assembly, which includes all 193 U.N. member nations, where it is virtually certain to be approved. But unlike Security Council resolutions, assembly resolutions are not legally binding.

The Security Council will then likely start discussing the much-lengthier U.S. draft resolution, which would for the first time not only condemn Hamas' Oct. 7 attack but its hostage taking and killing, "murder, and

sexual violence including rape." Some council members blocked the condemnation of Hamas in two previous council resolutions on Gaza.

The U.S. draft doesn't name Israel, but in a clear reference the draft "condemns calls by government ministers for the resettlement of Gaza and rejects any attempt at demographic or territorial change in Gaza that would violate international law."

## **South Korean doctors walk out to protest government policy, causing many surgery cancellations**

By JIWON SONG and HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korean trainee doctors collectively walked off their jobs Tuesday to escalate their protest of a government medical policy, triggering cancellations of surgeries and other medical treatments at hospitals.

The Health Ministry urged them to return to work immediately, saying they must not endanger the lives of patients to fight the government.

As of Monday night, more than half of the 13,000 trainee doctors in South Korea were confirmed to have submitted resignations en masse to protest a government push to increase the number of medical students. A total of 1,630 of them have left their work sites, according to Health Ministry records.

More trainee doctors are expected to follow suit. Under a decision made by their association last week, trainee doctors at the country's five major hospitals were supposed to walk off collectively on Tuesday.

At the center of the dispute is a recent government announcement that it would raise medical school admissions by 2,000 from next year. The government says it's urgent to have more doctors to address what it calls a shortage of doctors, given the country's fast-aging population.

But the plan triggered a strong backlash from many doctors, who say the 2,000 new admissions are too many to be handled by medical schools and that resources must be used to resolve other issues first. They say producing too many doctors would also lead to unnecessary medical treatments due to increased competition among doctors. But their critics argue that doctors mainly worry their incomes would drop if there were more doctors.

Most of the 13,000 trainee doctors work at 100 hospitals across South Korea, assisting senior doctors during surgeries and treating patients. If their walkouts are prolonged or joined by senior doctors, that could cause disruptions at those hospitals and in South Korea's overall medical service, observers say.

South Korea has a total of 140,000 doctors. The Korea Medical Association said Monday it plans to hold rallies to support trainee doctors' collective action but hasn't determined whether to launch strikes.

At Seoul's Asan Medical Center, a nurse said it's unclear how long senior doctors could solely perform surgeries and other treatments without the assistance of trainee doctors. The nurse, who requested anonymity citing the sensitivity of the issue, said that trainee doctors typically handle skin incision and disinfection during surgeries at the direction of senior doctors and manage data on hospital computers.

She said her hospital plans to delay the planned acceptance of some cancer patients and to release inpatients early. Other Asan hospital officials said Tuesday that an unspecified number of trainee doctors didn't come to work but noted some are still working. They said the hospital is rearranging planned surgery schedules by reviewing the conditions of patients.

Vice Health Minister Park Min-soo said authorities have received 34 public complaints related to the trainee doctors' walkouts – 25 of them over the cancellation of surgeries. Other cases include hospitals refusing to treat patients and canceling planned medical treatments.

"If you leave your patients to oppose a government policy despite knowing what your collective action would cause, that can't be justified at all," Park said. "We appeal to trainee doctors to return to patients. An act of endangering the lives of patients to express your opinions is something that you must not do."

## Despite reforms, victims say church's in-house processes to handle sex abuse cases retraumatizes

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Five years ago this week, Pope Francis convened an unprecedented summit of bishops from around the world to impress on them that clergy sexual abuse was a global problem and that they needed to do something about it.

Over four days, these bishops heard harrowing tales of trauma from victims, learned how to investigate and sanction pedophile priests, and were warned that they too would face punishment if they continued to cover for abusers.

Yet five years later, despite new church laws to hold bishops accountable and promises to do better, the Catholic Church's in-house legal system and pastoral response to victims has proven incapable of dealing with the problem.

In fact, victims, outside investigators and even in-house canon lawyers increasingly say the church's response, crafted and amended over two decades of unrelenting scandal around the world, is downright damaging to the very people already harmed -- the victims. They are often retraumatized when they summon the courage to report their abuse through the church's silence, stonewalling and inaction.

"It's a horrific experience. And it's not something that I would advise anyone to do unless they are prepared to have not just their world, but their sense of being turned upside down," said Brian Devlin, a former Scottish priest whose internal, and then public accusations of sexual misconduct against the late Scottish Cardinal Keith O'Brien marked the cardinal's downfall.

"You become the troublemaker. You become the whistleblower. And I can well understand that people who go through that process end up with bigger problems than they had before they started it."

At the end of his 2019 summit, Francis vowed to confront abusive clergy with "the wrath of God." Within months, he passed a new law requiring all abuse to be reported in-house (but not to police) and mapped out procedures to investigate bishops who abuse or protect predator priests.

But five years later, the Vatican has offered no statistics on the number of bishops investigated or sanctioned. Even the pope's own child protection advisory commission says structural obstacles are harming victims and preventing basic justice.

"Recent publicly reported cases point to tragically harmful deficiencies in the norms intended to punish abusers and hold accountable those whose duty is to address wrongdoing," the commission said after its last assembly. "We are long overdue in fixing the flaws in procedures that leave victims wounded and in the dark both during and after cases have been decided."

At the 2019 summit, the norms enacted by the U.S. Catholic Church for sanctioning priests and protecting minors were held up as the gold standard. The U.S. bishops adopted a get tough policy after the U.S. abuse scandal exploded with the 2002 Boston Globe "Spotlight" series.

But even in the U.S., victims and canon lawyers say the system isn't working, and that's not even taking into consideration the new frontier of abuse cases involving adult victims. Some call it "charter fatigue," or a desire to move beyond the scandal that spawned the 2002 Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.

The Rev. Tom Doyle, a U.S. canon lawyer who worked for the Vatican embassy in Washington but now provides legal consulting for victims, says he no longer even advises they pursue church justice and instead work through secular courts.

Why? Because "the church will screw them every which way from Sunday," he said.

Nearly every investigation into abuse in Catholic Church that has been published in recent years -- church-commissioned reports in France and Germany, government inquests in Australia, a parliamentary one in Spain and law enforcement investigations in the U.S. -- has identified the church's in-house legal system as a big part of the problem.

While some reforms have been made -- Pope Francis lifted the official pontifical secret covering abuse

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cases in 2019 – core issues remain.

—The structural conflict of interest. According to church procedures, a bishop or religious superior conducts an investigation into allegations that one of his priests raped a child and then renders judgement. And yet the bishop or superior has a vested interest in his priest, since the priest is considered to be a spiritual son in whom the bishop has invested time, money and love.

It is difficult to think of any other legal system in the world where someone with a personal, paternal relationship with one party in a dispute could be expected to objectively and fairly render judgment in it.

The independent commission that investigated the abuse scandal in the French church said such a structural conflict of interest “appears, humanly speaking, untenable.”

Even the pope’s own Synod of Bishops came to a similar conclusion. In its November synthesis document after a monthlong meeting, the world’s bishops identified the conflict between a bishop’s role as father and judge in abuse cases as a problem and called for the possibility of assigning the task of judgement to “other structures.”

—The lack of fundamental rights for victims. In canonical abuse investigations, victims are mere third-party witnesses to their cases. They cannot participate in any of the secret proceedings, have no access to case files and no right to even know if a canonical investigation has been started, much less its status.

Only as a result of a Francis reform in 2019 are victims allowed to know the ultimate outcome of their case, but nothing else.

The Spanish ombudsman, tasked by the country’s congress of deputies to investigate abuse in the Spanish Catholic Church, said victims are often retraumatized by such a process, which it said falls far short of national or international standards.

The French experts went even further, arguing that the Holy See is essentially in breach of its obligations as a U.N. observer state and member of the Council of Europe, which requires it to uphold the basic human rights of victims.

-- No published case law. The Vatican’s sex abuse office doesn’t publish any of its decisions about how clergy sexual abuse cases have been adjudicated, even in redacted form.

That means that a bishop investigating an accusation against one of his priests has no way of knowing how the law has been applied in a similar case. It means canon law students have no case law to study or cite. It means academics, journalists and even victims have no way of knowing what types of behaviour gets sanctioned and whether penalties are being imposed arbitrarily or not.

The legal experts who investigated abuse in the Munich, Germany church said the publication of canonical decisions would help eliminate uncertainties for victims in how church law was being applied; Australia’s Royal Commission, the highest form of inquest in the country, similarly called for the redacted publication of its decisions and to provide written reasons for their decisions “in a timely manner.”

In-house, canon lawyers for years have complained that the lack of published cases was deepening doubts about the credibility and effectiveness of the churches’ response to the church scandal.

“All we can conclude is that this lack of systematic publication of the jurisprudence of the highest courts in the church is unworthy of a true legal system,” canon lawyer Kurt Martens told a conference in Rome late last year.

Monsignor John Kennedy, who heads the Vatican office that investigates abuse cases, said his staff was working diligently to process cases and had received praise from individual bishops, entire conferences who visit and religious superiors.

“We don’t talk about what we do in public but the feedback we receive and the comments from our members who recently met for the plenary are very encouraging. The pope also expressed his gratitude for the great work that is done in silence,” he said in a message to AP.



## Long after pope's abuse summit, victims still traumatized by the system meant to address their cases

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — One afternoon in mid-December, Pope Francis had a meeting that wasn't on his official agenda or otherwise recorded, that underscored the utter dysfunction of the Catholic Church's response to the global clergy sex abuse scandal.

In the main reception room of the Vatican hotel where he lives, Francis met for more than an hour with a Spaniard who as a young seminarian was molested by his spiritual director. The former seminarian was desperate.

He had lodged a complaint with the Toledo, Spain Archdiocese in 2009, and visited Vatican offices multiple times to deposit damning documents and demand action be taken against his abuser and the bishops who allegedly covered for him. But for 15 years, he had received no justice from the church.

While Francis' decision to hear his story was laudable and pastorally sensitive, it was also evidence that the church's in-house system to deal with abuse isn't working — from the laws available to punish abusers to its policies for helping survivors. For every victim who has enough well-connected friends at the Vatican who can arrange a papal audience, countless others will never feel that the church cares for them or will provide them justice.

Five years ago this week, Francis convened an unprecedented summit of bishops from around the world to impress on them that clergy abuse was a global problem and they needed to address it. Over four days, these bishops heard harrowing tales of trauma from victims, learned how to investigate and sanction pedophile priests, and were warned that they too would face punishment if they continued to cover for abusers.

Yet five years later, despite new church laws to hold bishops accountable and promises to do better, the Catholic Church's in-house legal system and pastoral response to victims has proven still incapable of dealing with the problem.

### STAKEHOLDERS WARN CHURCH'S EVOLVING RESPONSE STILL HARMS VICTIMS

In fact, victims, outside investigators and even in-house canon lawyers increasingly say the church's response, crafted and amended over two decades of unrelenting scandal around the world, is damaging to the very people already harmed — the victims. They are often retraumatized when they summon the courage to report abuse in the face of the church's silence, stonewalling and inaction.

"It's a horrific experience. And it's not something that I would advise anyone to do unless they are prepared to have not just their world, but their sense of being turned upside down," said Brian Devlin, a former Scottish priest whose internal, and then public accusations of sexual misconduct against the late Scottish Cardinal Keith O'Brien marked O'Brien's downfall.

"You become the troublemaker. You become the whistleblower. And I can well understand that people who go through that process end up with bigger problems than they had before they started it. It's a hugely, hugely, destructive process."

Then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger revolutionized the way the Catholic Church dealt with abusive clergy in 2001, when he persuaded St. John Paul II to order all abuse cases be sent to his office for review.

Ratzinger acted because, after nearly a quarter century at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he had seen that bishops weren't following the church's own laws and were moving predators around from parish to parish rather than sanctioning them.

At the end of his 2019 summit, Francis vowed to confront abusive clergy with "the wrath of God." Within months, he passed a new law requiring all abuse to be reported in-house to church authorities (but not to police) and mapped out procedures to investigate bishops who abused or protected predator priests.

But five years later, the Vatican has offered no statistics on the number of bishops investigated or sanctioned. Even the pope's own child protection advisory commission says structural problems built into the system are harming victims and preventing basic justice.

"Recent publicly reported cases point to tragically harmful deficiencies in the norms intended to punish

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abusers and hold accountable those whose duty is to address wrongdoing," the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors said after its last assembly. "We are long overdue in fixing the flaws in procedures that leave victims wounded and in the dark both during and after cases have been decided."

At the 2019 summit, the norms enacted by the U.S. Catholic Church for sanctioning priests and protecting minors were touted as the gold standard. The U.S. bishops adopted a get-tough policy after the U.S. abuse scandal exploded with the 2002 Boston Globe "Spotlight" series.

## SOME SAY VICTIMS SHOULD SKIP PURSUING JUSTICE FROM THE CHURCH

But even in the U.S., victims and canon lawyers say the system isn't working, and that's not even taking into consideration the new frontier of abuse cases involving adult victims. Some call it "charter fatigue," that the hierarchy simply wants to move on beyond the scandal that spawned the 2002 Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.

The Rev. Tom Doyle, a U.S. canon lawyer who worked for the Vatican embassy in Washington and now provides consulting for victims, says he no longer advises they pursue church justice.

Why? Because "the church will screw them every which way from Sunday," he said.

"Don't waste your time," Doyle says he tells victims. "The only justice, or semblance of justice that has been meted out is in civilian courts because the church can't screw them up."

Nearly every investigation into abuse in the Catholic Church that has been published in recent years has identified the church's in-house legal system as a big part of the problem, from church-commissioned reports in France and Germany to government inquests in Australia, parliamentary-mandated studies in Spain and law enforcement investigations in the U.S.

While some reforms have occurred, including Francis' lifting of the official secrecy covering abuse cases in 2019, core issues remain.

Part of the problem is that canon law was never meant to address the needs of abuse survivors or to help them heal: As stated the penal code, the goal of the system is entirely institution-centric: to "restore justice, reform the offender and repair scandal."

## REPORTS IDENTIFY SPECIFIC ISSUES WITH CHURCH'S LATEST POLICIES

Even after the Vatican announced a revised penal code, more than a decade in the making, the outside reports were remarkably uniform in identifying:

—The structural conflict of interest built into the system. According to church procedures, a bishop or religious superior investigates an allegation that one of his priests raped a child and then renders judgment. And yet the bishop or superior has a vested interest, since the priest is considered to be a spiritual son in whom the bishop has invested time, money and love.

It is difficult to think of any other legal system in the world where someone with such a personal, paternal relationship with one party in a dispute could be expected to objectively and fairly render judgment in it.

The independent commission that investigated the French church's abuse scandal said such a structural conflict of interest "appears, humanly speaking, untenable."

Even the pope's own Synod of Bishops came to a similar conclusion. In their November synthesis document after a monthlong meeting, the world's bishops identified conflict of interest as an ongoing problem.

"The sensitive issue of handling abuse places many bishops in the difficult situation of having to reconcile the role of father with that of judge," said the synod report, suggesting that the task of judgment be assigned to "other structures."

—The lack of fundamental rights for victims. In canonical abuse investigations, victims are mere third-party witnesses to their cases. They cannot participate in any of the secret proceedings, they have no access to case files and no right to even know if a canonical investigation has been started, much less its status.

Only due to a Francis reform in 2019 are victims allowed to know the ultimate outcome of their case, but nothing else.

The Spanish ombudsman, tasked by the country's congress of deputies to investigate abuse in the Spanish Catholic Church, said victims are often retraumatized by such a process.

"Despite the regulations enforced over the last few years, if we take into account international and na-

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tional standards on the minimum rights of victims in criminal proceedings, the rights and needs of victims in canon law proceedings continue to be neglected," the report found.

The French experts went further, arguing that the Vatican is essentially in breach of its obligations as a U.N. observer state and member of the Council of Europe, which requires upholding the basic human rights of victims.

Citing the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights, the French report noted that a fundamental right includes access to a fair trial "which guarantees, in particular, the right of access to independent justice and an adversarial procedure, and, for the victim, the right to an effective remedy."

"Canon law will only be able to provide a genuine response to the sexual abuse of children and vulnerable persons in the Catholic Church if it meets the universally recognized requirements of justice and if it is implemented more effectively," the French commission concluded.

—No published case law. Unlike the Vatican tribunal known as the Roman Rota, which publishes redacted marriage annulment cases, the Vatican's sex abuse office doesn't publish any of its decisions about how clergy sexual abuse cases have been adjudicated.

That means that a bishop investigating an accusation against one of his priests has no way of knowing how the law has been applied in a similar case. It means canon law students have no case law to study or cite. It means academics, journalists and even victims have no way of knowing what types of behavior gets sanctioned and whether penalties are being imposed arbitrarily or not.

Independent legal experts who investigated clergy abuse in Munich, Germany, said the publication of canonical decisions would help eliminate uncertainties for victims in how church law was being applied. Australia's Royal Commission, the highest form of inquest in the country, similarly called for the publication of abuse decisions, in redacted form, and to provide written reasons for their decisions "in a timely manner."

In-house, canon lawyers for years have complained that the lack of published cases was deepening doubts about the credibility and effectiveness of the churches' response to the church scandal.

"This lack of systematic publication of the jurisprudence of the highest courts in the church is unworthy of a true legal system," Kurt Martens, a professor at Catholic University of America told a canon law conference in Rome late last year.

Monsignor John Kennedy, who heads the Vatican office investigating abuse cases, said his staff was working diligently to process cases and had received praise from individual bishops, entire conferences who visit and religious superiors.

"We don't talk about what we do in public but the feedback we receive and the comments from our members who recently met for the Plenaria are very encouraging," he wrote to The Associated Press. "The pope also expressed his gratitude for the great work that is done in silence."

But such praise appears to come mostly from the hierarchy, not those who have been harmed: the victims.

They are left to languish, even if — as now advised by the church — they report their abuse. The Spanish seminarian who met with the pope first filed his complaint against his abuser with the Toledo Archdiocese in 2009. But the Toledo archbishop only launched an internal investigation in 2021 and informed the Vatican, after Spain's El Pais newspaper reported on the case.

The AP does not identify sexual abuse victims unless they choose to go public.

In October, a Spanish criminal court convicted the priest and sentenced him to seven years. An appeals court recently voided the sentence on a technicality.

The seminarian has remained in touch with Francis and recently wrote him saying he was "exhausted" with the process but had nevertheless appealed to Spain's Supreme Court.

Francis called him right back and encouraged him to keep fighting, he said.

## As the Ukraine war enters a third year, Putin waits for Western support for Kyiv to wither

By The Associated Press undefined

When the invasion of Ukraine began in February 2022, some analysts predicted it might take as few as three days for Russian forces to capture the capital of Kyiv.

With the war now entering its third year, Russian President Vladimir Putin seems to be trying to turn that initial failure to his advantage — by biding his time and waiting for Western support for Ukraine to wither while Moscow maintains its steady military pressure along the front line.

Putin's longer timeline still has its downside, with the conflict taking a heavy toll on Russia by draining its economic and military resources and fueling social tensions even as the death of imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny serves as a chilling reminder of the Kremlin's ruthless crackdown on dissent.

Putin has repeatedly signaled a desire to negotiate an end to the fighting but warned that Russia will hold onto its gains. Earlier this month, he used an interview with former Fox News host Tucker Carlson to urge the United States to push its "satellite" Ukraine into peace talks, declaring that "sooner or later, we will come to an agreement."

Some recent developments have fed the Kremlin's optimism.

Aid for Ukraine remains stuck in the U.S. Congress while NATO allies have struggled to fill the gap following Ukraine's underperforming counteroffensive last summer. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's decision to dismiss his popular military chief, Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi, disappointed many in the country and worried its Western allies.

And Donald Trump, who has repeatedly claimed that he would negotiate a quick deal to end the war if elected, recently spooked NATO by saying he could allow Russia to expand its aggression in Europe if alliance members fail to increase their defense spending.

Tatiana Stanovaya of the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center said a possible Trump return to the White House would serve Putin's goals.

"He sees Trump as a figure likely to wreak destruction and believes the consequences of a second Trump presidency would be to weaken the West and deprive Ukraine of the support it needs," Stanovaya said in a commentary.

As the Kremlin watches for more signs of crumbling Western support for Ukraine, Russian forces captured the eastern stronghold of Avdiivka over the weekend after a fierce battle in which Ukrainian forces reported an increasingly desperate shortage of munitions. The seizure set the stage for a potential Russian push deeper into Ukraine-held territory.

"While no large-scale offensive is currently taking place, Russian units are tasked with conducting smaller tactical attacks that at minimum inflict steady losses on Ukraine and allow Russian forces to seize and hold positions," said Jack Watling and Nick Reynolds of the Royal United Services Institute. "In this way, the Russians are maintaining a consistent pressure on a number of points."

Amid the fierce battles in the east, Russia also has sought to cripple Ukraine's defense industries with a steady series of strikes. It has used long-range cruise and ballistic missiles as well as Iranian-made Shahed drones to saturate and overwhelm Ukrainian air defenses that are experiencing a growing shortage of munitions.

"In terms of Russian industry's capacity to support ongoing operations, Russia has significantly mobilized its defense industry, increasing shifts and expanding production lines at existing facilities as well as bringing previously mothballed plants back online," Watling and Reynolds said. "This has led to significant increases in production output."

They also note that Russian arms industries continue to depend on Western-supplied components, arguing that tighter enforcement of sanctions could disrupt this.

Some Moscow analysts acknowledge, however, that the Russian military is facing multiple challenges.

Retired Gen. Yuri Baluyevsky, the former chief of the military's General Staff, admitted that Ukrainian air defenses has effectively barred Russian warplanes from Ukrainian airspace and often make it risky for



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them to operate even over Russian-controlled territory. Baluyevsky said in a recent article that Western-supplied artillery are superior to Russian systems.

Western officials and analysts note that while the 1,500-kilometer (930-mile) front line has remained largely static with neither side making significant gains, Ukrainian forces have launched bold missile and drone attacks deep behind the line of contact, raising the costs for the Kremlin and challenging Putin's attempts to pretend that life in Russia is largely unaffected by the war.

Ukraine has launched audacious attacks on oil terminals and refineries deep inside Russia, as well as its naval and air assets in the Black Sea region, in a painful blow to Moscow's military capability.

That includes the sinking of two Russian amphibious assault ships and a missile boat along with strikes on air bases in Crimea that knocked out radar facilities and destroyed warplanes. Last month, Ukrainian troops downed a Russian early warning and control aircraft over the Sea of Azov and badly damaged a flying command post — some of Moscow's most precious intelligence assets.

Western officials praised the efficiency of Ukrainian attacks, noting Kyiv has smartly used its limited resources to rout far more numerous Russian forces and destroy about 20% of the Black Sea Fleet, effectively ending Moscow's maritime dominance there.

The U.K. Ministry of Defense said in a recent intelligence update that Ukraine's successes forced the Russian navy to sharply limit operations in the western Black Sea, allowing Kyiv to expand its agricultural exports despite Moscow's withdrawal from a deal brokered by Turkey and the U.N. that guaranteed safe shipment of Ukrainian grain.

Putin, who is all but certain to win another six-year term in the March 15-17 presidential election, has sought to consolidate public support by casting the conflict as a fight against the expansionist West that has armed Ukraine in a bid to weaken Russia.

Even though he claims the public overwhelmingly supports what the Kremlin calls its "special military operation" in Ukraine, new cracks have emerged in the country's tightly controlled political system.

Thousands of Russians lined up in freezing temperatures in many cities to sign petitions supporting the candidacy of Boris Nadezhdin, a liberal politician who made ending the war his chief campaign pledge. While Nadezhdin was eventually barred from the ballot by election officials who tossed out many signatures as invalid, the massive show of opposition sympathies clearly embarrassed the Kremlin.

In another sign of anti-war sentiments, wives of some soldiers recruited during a hasty and widely unpopular partial mobilization in fall 2022 demanded their discharge from service.

But Putin has continued to project total control: Police arrested hundreds simply for laying flowers in tribute to Navalny, whose death dealt a devastating blow to the already fractured opposition.

Adding to the Kremlin's problems, protesters clashed with police in the province of Bashkortostan last month following the conviction and sentencing of a local activist. The protest, driven by tensions between indigenous Bashkir people and ethnic Russians, raised the specter of new cultural and nationalist divisions.

Last summer, Putin faced perhaps the most serious challenge in his nearly quarter-century rule when mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin ordered his private military company to march on Moscow to oust top military leaders. The brief mutiny ended with a deal envisioning the mercenaries moving to Russian ally Belarus, and Prigozhin died in a suspicious plane crash two months later that was widely seen as the Kremlin's revenge.

His death shored up Putin's authority and cemented loyalty among the elite, but the episode showed the fragility of Kremlin power.

Despite challenges, Russia's vast economic and military potential gives Putin the ability for a protracted war.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov says the conflict has taken longer than expected because of Western intervention. "The special military operation may last for somewhat longer, but this can't change the course of things," he said.

Mark Galeotti, head of the Mayak Intelligence consultancy, said in a recent podcast that "there is no obvious resistance to Putin" because of "a strongly established and pervasive police state there to protect him."

"So on the one level, we shouldn't anticipate that predictable levels of pressure are likely to bring this regime down at any particular point," Galeotti said. "But on the other hand, we also have to acknowledge that its capacity to respond to crises, to the unexpected, has been strikingly diminished."

## First federal gender-based hate crime starts in South Carolina over trans woman's killing

By JAMES POLLARD Associated Press/Report for America

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — The first federal trial over a hate crime based on gender identity is set to begin Tuesday in South Carolina, where a man faces charges that he killed a Black transgender woman and then fled to New York.

The U.S. Department of Justice alleges that in August 2019, Daqua Lameek Ritter coaxed the woman — who is anonymously referred to as "Dime Doe" in court documents — into driving to a sparsely populated rural county in South Carolina. Ritter shot her three times in the head after they reached an isolated area near a relative's home, according to Breon Peace, the U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of New York, where Ritter was arrested last January.

In recent years there has been a surge in attacks on the LGBTQ+ community. For decades, transgender women of color have faced disproportionately high rates of violence and hate crimes, according to the Department of Homeland Security. In 2022, the number of gender identity-based hate crimes reported by the FBI increased by 37% compared to the previous year.

Until 2009, federal hate crime laws did not account for offenses motivated by the victim's sexual orientation or gender identity. The first conviction involving a victim targeted for their gender identity came in 2017. A Mississippi man who pleaded guilty to killing a 17-year-old transgender woman received a 49-year prison sentence.

But Tuesday marks the first time that such a case has ever been brought to trial, according to Brook Andrews, the assistant U.S. attorney for the District of South Carolina. Never before has a federal jury decided whether to punish someone for a crime based on the victim's gender identity.

The government has said that Ritter's friends and girlfriend learned about a sexual relationship between Ritter and the woman in the month prior to the killing. The two had been close friends, according to the defense, and were related through Ritter's aunt and the woman's uncle.

Prosecutors believe the revelation, which prompted Ritter's girlfriend to hurl a homophobic slur, made Ritter "extremely upset."

"His crime was motivated by his anger at being mocked for having a sexual relationship with a transgender woman," government lawyers wrote in a filing last January.

They say that Ritter lied that day about his whereabouts to state police and fled South Carolina. Prosecutors have said he enlisted others to help burn his clothes, hide the weapon and mislead police about his location on the day of the murder.

Government lawyers plan to present witness testimony about Ritter's location and text messages with the woman, in which he allegedly persuaded her to take the ride. Evidence also includes video footage taken at a traffic stop that captures him in the woman's car hours before her death.

Other evidence includes DNA from the woman's car and testimony from multiple people who say that Ritter privately confessed to them about the fatal shooting.

Ritter's lawyers have said it is no surprise that Ritter might have been linked to the woman's car, considering their intimate ties. The defense has argued that no physical evidence points to Ritter as the perpetrator. Further, the defense has said the witnesses' claims that Ritter tried to dispose of evidence are inconsistent.

Prosecutors don't plan to seek the death penalty, but Ritter could receive multiple life sentences if convicted by a jury. In addition to the hate crimes charge, Ritter faces two other counts that he committed murder with a firearm and misled investigators.

## Capital One to buy Discover for \$35 billion in deal that combines major US credit card companies

By KEN SWEET AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Capital One Financial said it will buy Discover Financial Services for \$35 billion, in a deal that would bring together two of the nation's credit card companies as well as potentially shake up the payments industry, which is largely dominated by Visa and Mastercard.

Under the terms of the all-stock transaction, Discover Financial shareholders will receive Capital One shares valued at nearly \$140. That's a significant premium to the \$110.49 that Discover shares closed at Friday.

The deal marries two of the largest credit card companies that aren't banks first, like JPMorgan Chase and Citigroup, with the notable exception of American Express. It also brings together two companies whose customers are largely similar: often Americans who are looking for cash back or modest travel rewards, compared to the premium credit cards dominated by AmEx, Citi and Chase.

"This marketplace that's dominated by the big players is going to shrink a little bit more now," said Matt Schulz, chief credit card analyst at LendingTree.

It also will give Discover's payment network a major credit card partner in a way that could make the payment network a major competitor once again. The U.S. credit card industry is dominated by the Visa-Mastercard duopoly with AmEx being a distance third place and Discover an even more distant fourth place. It's unclear whether Capital One will adopt the Discover payment system or may set up a payment network that allows parallel use of Discover and a second payment network like Visa.

"Our acquisition of Discover is a singular opportunity to bring together two very successful companies with complementary capabilities and franchises, and to build a payments network that can compete with the largest payments networks and payments companies," said Richard Fairbank, the chairman and CEO of Capital One, in a statement.

With its purchase of Discover, Capital One is betting that Americans' will continue to increasingly use their credit cards and keep balances on those accounts to collect interest. In the fourth quarter of 2022, Americans held \$1.13 trillion on their credit cards, and aggregate household debt balances increased by \$212 billion, up 1.2%, according to the latest data from the New York Federal Reserve.

As they run up their card balances, consumers are also paying higher interest rates. The average interest rate on a bank credit card is roughly 21.5%, the highest it's been since the Federal Reserve started tracking the data in 1994.

Capital One has long has a business model looking for customers who will keep a balance on their cards, aiming for customers with lower credit scores than American Express or even Discover.

At the same time, the two lenders have had to boost their reserves against the possibility of rising borrower defaults. After battling inflation for more than two years, many lower- and middle-income Americans have run through their savings and are increasingly running up their credit card balances and taking on personal loans.

The additional reserves have weighed on both banks' profits. Last year, Capital One's net income available to common shareholders slumped 35% versus 2022, as its provisions for loan losses soared 78% to \$10.4 billion. Discover's full-year profit sank 33.6% versus its 2022 results as its provisions for credit losses more than doubled to \$6.02 billion.

Discover's customers are carrying \$102 billion in balances on their credit cards, up 13% from a year earlier. Meanwhile, the charge-off rates and 30-day delinquency rates have climbed.

Beyond boosting bank deposits and loan accounts, the acquisition would give Capital One access to the Discover payment processing network. While smaller than industry giants Visa and Mastercard, the Discover network will enable Capital One to get revenue from fees charged for every merchant transaction that runs on the network.

Discover has been operating under heightened scrutiny from regulators. Last summer, the company disclosed that beginning around mid-2007, it incorrectly classified certain card accounts into its highest merchant pricing tiers. The company also received an unrelated consent order from the Federal Deposit

Insurance Corporation over its customer compliance management.

Analysts at Citigroup say the regulatory issues may have prompted the sale.

"We are surprised that DFS would sell, but suppose that its regulatory challenges such as its recent October FDIC consent order and the card product misclassification issue may have opened the door for the board to consider strategic alternatives that it may not have in the past," wrote analysts Arren Cyganovich and Kaili Wang in a note to clients.

It's unclear whether the deal will pass regulatory scrutiny. Nearly every bank issues a credit card to customers but few companies are credit card companies first, and banks second. Both Discover — which was long ago the Sears Card — and Capital One started off as credit card companies that expanded into other financial offerings like checking and savings accounts.

Consumer groups are expected to put heavy pressure on the Biden Administration to make sure the deal is good for consumers as well as shareholders.

"The deal also poses massive anti-trust concerns, given the vertical integration of Capital One's credit card lending with Discover's credit card network," said Jesse Van Tol, president and CEO of the National Community Reinvestment Coalition.

## **Navalny's widow vows to continue his fight against the Kremlin and punish Putin for his death**

By The Associated Press undefined

The widow of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny vowed on Monday to continue his fight against the Kremlin, while authorities denied his mother access to a morgue where his body is believed to be held after his death last week in an Arctic penal colony.

With her voice cracking at times in a video posted on social media, Yulia Navalnaya accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of killing her husband in the remote prison and alleged that officials' refusal to hand over the body to her mother-in-law was part of a cover-up.

Russian authorities said that the cause of Navalny's death Friday at age 47 is still unknown — and the results of any investigation are likely to be questioned abroad. Many Western leaders have already said they hold Putin responsible for the death.

Navalny's death has deprived the Russian opposition of its most well-known and inspiring politician less than a month before an election that is all but certain to give Putin another six years in power. It dealt a devastating blow to many Russians, who had seen Navalny as a rare hope for political change amid Putin's unrelenting crackdown on the opposition.

Navalny had been imprisoned since January 2021, when he returned to Moscow after recuperating in Germany from a nerve agent poisoning that he blamed on the Kremlin. He received three prison terms since his arrest, on a number of charges he has rejected as politically motivated.

"They are cowardly and meanly hiding his body, refusing to give it to his mother and lying miserably while waiting for the trace of" poison to disappear, Navalnaya said, suggesting her husband might have been killed with a Novichok-style nerve agent.

She urged Russians to rally behind her "to share not only the grief and endless pain that has enveloped and gripped us, but also my rage."

She continued: "The main thing that we can do for Alexei and ourselves is to keep fighting. ... We all need to get together in one strong fist and strike that mad regime."

On Monday, Ivan Zhdanov, the director of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, said Navalny's body would not be given to his mother for 14 days while a chemical examination of it takes place, according to a Russian investigator.

Navalny spokesperson Kira Yarmysh said the Investigative Committee, the country's top criminal investigation agency, informed Lyudmila Navalnaya that the official probe into the death had been extended. "They lie, buy time for themselves and do not even hide it," Yarmysh posted on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter.



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With authorities offering no more information on the death after the brief initial statement, many Russians speculated about what might have happened to Navalny. Independent Russian outlets released reports attempting to shed light on his death. Some called into question the official narrative — but their reports were not possible to verify.

In Brussels on Monday, Navalny's widow met with European Union foreign ministers and other officials. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the bloc was mulling sanctions against Russia and he also called for an independent international investigation into the causes of Navalny's death.

He said responsibility for Navalny's death lies with "Putin himself, but we can go down to the institutional structure of the penitentiary system in Russia," to impose asset freezes and travel bans.

President Joe Biden said Monday his administration is also considering imposing additional sanctions on Russia.

Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski described Navalnaya as "very dignified, very composed," and urged his EU counterparts to act on Navalnaya's request that the bloc impose sanctions on more of Putin's backers, beyond the oligarchs and other senior Russian officials already being targeted.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov slammed the accusations from Western leaders as "boorish" and "inadmissible."

"Those statements can't do any harm to the head of our state, but they certainly aren't becoming for those who make them," Peskov said in a call with reporters.

Yarmysh said that Navalny's 69-year-old mother and his lawyers were not allowed into the morgue in Salekhard, the capital of the Arctic Yamalo-Nenets region, on Monday morning. The staff didn't answer when they asked if the body was there, Yarmysh said.

Asked when Navalny's body could be handed over to his family, Peskov responded that the Kremlin was not involved in those proceedings, adding that the official probe was continuing in line with the law.

Observers said that the law allows authorities to keep the body for a long time if the investigation is ongoing and block any requests for an independent forensic study.

Navalny's ally Ivan Zhdanov denounced the Russian authorities as "lackeys and liars."

"It's clear what they are doing now — covering up the traces of their crime," he wrote Monday.

Since Navalny's death, nearly 400 people have been detained by police in Russia as they streamed to ad-hoc memorials and monuments to victims of political repression with flowers and candles to pay tribute to Navalny, according to OVD-Info, a group that monitors political arrests. The U.S. and British ambassadors also mourned Navalny's death at a memorial in Moscow.

Authorities cordoned off some of the memorials across the country and were removing flowers at night, but they kept appearing.

Over 50,000 people have submitted requests to the Russian government asking for Navalny's remains to be handed over to his relatives, OVD-Info said.

Russia's Federal Penitentiary Service reported that Navalny felt sick after a walk Friday and became unconscious at the penal colony where he was being held. An ambulance arrived, but he couldn't be revived, the service said.

After the last verdict that handed him a 19-year term, Navalny said he understood he was "serving a life sentence, which is measured by the length of my life or the length of life of this regime."

In her video statement, Navalnaya said: "By killing Alexei, Putin killed half of me, half of my heart and half of my soul."

"But I still have the other half, and it tells me that I have no right to give up. I will continue the work of Alexei Navalny," she declared.

## More than 29,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel-Hamas war, Gaza Health Ministry says

By WAFAA SHURAFI and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel's assault in Gaza has killed more than 29,000 Palestinians since Oct. 7, the territory's Health Ministry said Monday, marking another grim milestone in one of the deadliest and most destructive military campaigns in recent history.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to continue the offensive until "total victory" against Hamas after the militants' Oct. 7 attack on Israeli communities. He and the military have said troops will move soon into the southernmost town of Rafah on the Egyptian border, where over half of Gaza's 2.3 million people have sought refuge from fighting elsewhere.

The United States, Israel's top ally, says it is still working with mediators Egypt and Qatar to try to broker another cease-fire and hostage release agreement. But those efforts appear to have stalled in recent days, and Netanyahu angered Qatar by calling on it to pressure Hamas and suggesting it funds the militant group.

The conflict has also brought near daily exchanges of fire between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group that frequently threaten to escalate.

Israeli warplanes on Monday carried out at least two strikes near the southern port city of Sidon in one of the largest attacks near a major city, wounding 14 people, Lebanese state media said. The Israeli military said it attacked Hezbollah arms depots near Sidon in retaliation for a drone that exploded in an open field near the northern Israeli city of Tiberias earlier Monday.

In Gaza, the Health Ministry said the death toll had risen to 29,092 since the start of the war, around two-thirds of them women and children. More than 69,000 Palestinians have been wounded, overwhelming the territory's hospitals, less than half of which are even partially functioning. The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its count.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel from Gaza on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 men, women and children hostage. After a round of exchanges for Palestinians imprisoned by Israel in November, around 130 remain captive, a fourth of them believed to be dead.

The Israeli military released a video Monday showing what is believed to be the youngest hostage, his brother and mother being led through the streets of the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis soon after their kidnapping on Oct. 7.

The video provides evidence that Shiri Bibas and her two young boys, Ariel, 4, and Kfir, who was 9 months old at the time, survived the initial kidnapping. The boys are the only children who remain in captivity, along with their mother.

Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the military's chief spokesman, said the army is "very concerned" about the family's wellbeing. He said the army found the videos in security cameras seized during its offensive in Khan Younis.

The video appears to show Bibas, wrapped in a blanket, being led through a dirt street by her captors as she carries Ariel. The military said it believed that Kfir was in a baby sling and could not be seen under the blanket.

The infant with red hair and a toothless smile has become a symbol across Israel for the helplessness and anger over the hostages still held in Gaza. Their father, Yarden Bibas, is also still in captivity.

In a statement, the extended Bibas family said the videos "tear our hearts out." They made a desperate plea for negotiations to release all of the hostages. In January, the family and hundreds of activists marked Kfir's first birthday in what his family called "the saddest birthday party in the world."

With thousands of Palestinians detained by Israel since the war began, an Israeli human rights group reported that Palestinians inside Israeli prisons face daily violence from guards, who enter cells and beat inmates with batons, kicks and fists without provocation in abuse it said could amount to torture. Physicians for Human Rights—Israel said in a report Monday that detainees reported guards urinating on them and forcing them to kiss the Israeli flag and to strip. Prisoners are also held in overcrowded cells and deprived

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of water for long periods, it said.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern about hundreds of Palestinian women and girls in Israeli detention. It said there were credible reports that at least two were raped, and others "subjected to multiple forms of sexual assault," including being stripped naked and searched by male officers and being photographed "in degrading circumstances."

Israel says it has killed over 10,000 Palestinian militants but has provided no evidence for its count. The military says it tries to avoid harming civilians and blames the high death toll on Hamas because the militant group fights in dense residential neighborhoods. The military says 236 of its soldiers have been killed since the start of the ground offensive in late October.

On Sunday, Benny Gantz, a member of Netanyahu's three-man War Cabinet, warned that the offensive would expand to Rafah if the hostages are not freed by the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, expected around March 10.

Israel has said it is developing plans to evacuate civilians from Rafah, but it's not clear where they would go in the devastated territory, large areas of which have been flattened. Egypt has sealed the border and warned that any mass influx of Palestinians could threaten its decades-old peace treaty with Israel.

Already, the war has driven around 80% of the Palestinians in Gaza from their homes and has left a quarter of the population starving, according to U.N. officials.

The United States says it is still pushing for a truce and hostage-release, and that it would veto a U.N. Security Council resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire because it conflicts with those efforts.

In an interview with Al-Jazeera, a senior official in Hamas, Khalil al-Haya, repeated the group's demands for releasing the remaining hostages — an end to Israel's assault, the withdrawal of its troops from Gaza and the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, including top militants. He also said regional stability hinges on the establishment of a fully sovereign Palestinian state — though he did not specify what its borders should be.

Netanyahu has rejected Hamas' demands. In a speech before American Jewish leaders on Sunday, he said pressure should be applied on Qatar, which played a key role in mediating last year's cease-fire and hostage release deal.

"Qatar can press Hamas as no one else can. They host Hamas leaders, Hamas is dependent on them financially," Netanyahu said. "I urge you to press Qatar to press Hamas because we want our hostages released."

Majed al-Ansari, Qatar's foreign ministry spokesperson, dismissed Netanyahu's remarks as "a new attempt to stall and prolong the war for reasons that have become obvious to everyone," alluding to the Israeli leader's domestic political troubles.

Qatar denies funding Hamas and says its provision of aid to Gaza in recent years was carried out in full coordination with Israel, the U.S. and other parties.

"The Israeli prime minister knows very well that Qatar has been committed from day one to mediation efforts, ending the crisis and freeing the hostages," al-Ansari said.

## **Hundreds are set to descend on Tahiti for Olympic surfing. Can locals protect their way of life?**

By DANIEL COLE Associated Press

TEAHUPO'O, French Polynesia (AP) — Peva Levy said he felt a powerful, natural energy known as "mana" when he surfed Teahupo'o's waves on a piece of plywood for the first time, rushing down a crumbling white surf in front of an untouched volcanic beach several years before the steady streams of surfers started arriving when the village got its first asphalt road over fifty years ago.

"It was a secret spot," the surfer and Tahitian native remembered, as he stood on the pristine beaches of Teahupo'o on the island's south side, waves crashing off in the distance. "But it was not a secret spot for a long time."

Teahupo'o has since achieved world renown among surfers — the roaring wave garnered a reputation

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for its ferocious power — and will be home to the 2024 Paris Olympics surfing competition, scheduled from July 27 to Aug. 4.

The island in French Polynesia is an overseas territory of the European nation. The decision to host part of the Games here has thrust unprecedented challenges onto a small community that has long cherished and strives to protect a way of life more closely connected to wild lands and crystal-clear ocean than the fame promised by an Olympic stage. And while organizers are trying to adjust their plans to conserve the local environment, ensuring that the village of Teahupo'o stays a village is proving to be a struggle for locals.

The original proposed scale of the Olympic site — which called for new roads, housing units and even an aluminum judging tower that required drilling into the reef — caused a significant local backlash. Environmental and surf communities banded together to protect Teahupo'o's culture, its corals and its marine life.

"It was too much for us, a big change. And it was just for, like, one week" of competition, Levy said, who's also a member of the local environmental organization Vai Ara O Teahupo'o.

Though it's known throughout the surfing world, there is not one surf shop in Teahupo'o, with the town forgoing most of the development that's usually a staple at popular surf destinations. At the end of the village's road lies its sole snack bar which is only open for lunch and serves fish caught that morning. Kids spend the afternoon surfing as families watch from the black sand beaches. At night, the distant roar of waves barreling down onto the reef lulls the town to sleep.

"We loved this place because it was still wild, there were not many people over here. There was a lot of fish all around, and that good mana," Levy said.

In response to criticism, now 98% of Olympic housing will be within the homes of locals, with athletes accommodated on a cruise ship anchored nearby. The size of the judging tower has been scaled back and new infrastructure plans are being drawn up to minimize the need for new construction.

But concerns remain: Environmentalists and local fishers fear that drilling into the coral reef could attract ciguatera, a microscopic algae that infects fish and makes people sick if eaten, and many sustain themselves by what they catch in the ocean.

Mormon Maitei, 22, makes a living from spearfishing in the lagoons, feeding his family and selling what he has left over. "The lagoon is our refrigerator, it's where we get our dinner from," he said.

The sought-after shape of the waves could be affected, too, islanders say, if the reef were to fissure and lose the shape that the waves rely on to form.

"If it does crack and break off, there will be no more wave over here, it will be finished for us," said Levy.

In December, local fears were confirmed when a barge razed sections of coral on its way to the construction site on the reef. A video of the damage spread on social media, provoking an outcry.

Cindy Otčenasek, the president of Via Ara o Teahupo'o, called the destruction deeply hurtful. "In Polynesian culture, gods are present everywhere, in the coral, in the ocean," she said. "The ocean is considered to be the most sacred temple."

"The fish live around the corals so if we break a coral, we break a home," she said.

Olympic organizers expressed their concern over the incident.

"It was awful for us," said Barbara Martins-Nio, a senior event manager for the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games Organization Committee. "Tahitians have this special relationship with nature, with their lands, and it was like a bomb for us."

Martins-Nio said that their interactions with local groups are now improving, and the organizing team has taken a step back on several issues and are better involving local groups so that construction work is fully transparent.

Despite the fears, some on the island still see the Games as an opportunity. Much of the local population is in favor of the Games, the economic benefits it could bring and the standing it will give their little corner of French Polynesia.

Born and raised in Teahupo'o, Gregory Parker's morning routine consists of watching the waves crash along the horizon from his beachfront bungalow while smoking a cigarette. But while the Games are in town, he's willing to sacrifice that for a bit of spare cash by renting it out.



His family owns a significant portion of properties in the village that are regularly rented out to the international surf community during the annual World Surf League competition, and he intends to do the same for the Olympics.

"I will try to live at my daughter's house during the Games. If she also rents out her house, I have a tent," Parker said. "It's not hard for two weeks, and given all the money I will make, it's worth it."

In January this year, just months before the Games, a small group of local surfers bobbed up and down in the water, awaiting the perfect wave, when 21-year-old Kauli Vaast, who's competing in this year's Olympics, spotted it forming.

He's quick to slide his board into one of the glassy tubes, gliding out before the wave thunders down onto the reef, a monstrous spray of lapping white froth raining down behind him.

"Magical things happen here, you feel this energy and you must show respect," said Vaast. "It is so important to show respect in these types of places where you face mother nature."

Vaast learned how to surf on these waves at just eight years old, nearly 40 years after Peva Levy first felt the wave's mana. Mana that many islanders feel — and want to preserve.

"We hear a lot about the infrastructure and heritage that will be left by the Olympic Games, but we already have an ancestral heritage," said Via Ara o Teahupo'o's Otcenasek. "Teahupo'o is the land of God before being the land of the Games."

## **William Byron launches Hendrick Motorsports' 40th anniversary season with win in Daytona 500**

By JENNA FRYER AP Auto Racing Writer

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (AP) — The goal was obvious to William Byron: put the No. 24 Chevrolet in victory lane in the 2024 Daytona 500 to launch Hendrick Motorsports' 40th anniversary season.

Mission accomplished, even if Byron had to complete an agonizing final lap under caution around Daytona International Speedway awaiting the winner to be declared.

"Did we win it? Did we win it?" Byron kept asking over his radio.

The emotion he heard over his radio from crew chief Rudy Fugle confirmed Byron had just won the biggest race of his career.

"Well, no one told me. And Rudy was crying on the radio, so I was like 'Dude, I hope he's crying for good reason,'" Byron said. "I guess he was a ball of emotion there, and so I was like 'Did we actually win or not?'"

Byron snapped Hendrick Motorsports' nine-race Daytona 500 losing streak with a win Monday in the rain-delayed "Great American Race." He crossed under the white flag denoting the final lap at the exact moment a crash broke out behind him. The caution flag was thrown and he wasn't quite sure if he was the official winner as he circled Daytona one final time.

The last Hendrick driver to win the Daytona 500 was Dale Earnhardt Jr. in 2014. The 26-year-old from Charlotte, North Carolina, is the sixth different driver to win the 500 for Rick Hendrick, the winningest team owner in NASCAR history who made his way to victory lane on the actual 40th anniversary of his first Cup win.

"The first time we came here, we didn't think we had any business even being here," Hendrick said in victory lane. "We felt way out of our league. Now here we are 40 years later. You couldn't write the script any better. To win this on the 40th, to the day, it's just awesome."

The ninth Daytona 500 win for Hendrick Motorsports tied the team with Petty Enterprises for most in NASCAR history.

"William Byron was already a superstar, and I mean, he just went to another level of being superstar," said Hendrick vice chairman Jeff Gordon, himself a three-time Daytona 500 winner in the No. 24 Chevrolet.

"I wasn't driving the car, but I felt like I was making every lap out there with him," he said. "We're going to celebrate. This is a huge win."

Byron, who had never finished higher than 21st in the Daytona 500, is a self-taught racer who used

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computer equipment to hone his skills. He made it to the championship last season when Byron won a career-high six races, but lost out on the title to Ryan Blaney, the older brother of Byron's longtime girlfriend.

"I'm just a kid from racing on computers and winning the Daytona 500, I can't believe it," Byron said. "I wish my dad was here. He's sick, but this is for him, man. We've been through so much, and we sat up in the grandstands together and watched the race."

The fourth and final caution of the race began when Hendrick driver Alex Bowman hit Byron from behind and it caused Byron to sideswipe Brad Keselowski and trigger a 23-car crash that caused a red flag that lasted more than 15 minutes.

There were four laps remaining on the final restart and Byron was in second in the No. 24 Chevrolet. He and Ross Chastain of Trackhouse Racing pushed back and forth for the lead and it was Byron out front as a crash broke out behind him just as he'd crossed under the white flag marking the final lap of the race.

Byron was followed by teammate Bowman in a 1-2 sweep for Chevrolet and Hendrick. Christopher Bell in a Toyota for Joe Gibbs Racing finished third and was followed by Chevys from Corey Lajoie of Spire Motorsports and AJ Allmendinger of Kaulig Racing.

Bubba Wallace was sixth in a Toyota for 23XI Racing and was followed by John Hunter Nemecheck in another Toyota but for Legacy Motor Club. Chase Briscoe was eighth in a Ford for Stewart-Haas Racing and followed by Legacy driver Erik Jones and SHR teammate Noah Gragson.

The race ran one day later than scheduled because of persistent rain all weekend at Daytona. Monday was supposed to open with the rescheduled second-tier Xfinity Series race and then lead into the 500, but when it was still raining Monday morning, NASCAR reordered the events and made the Xfinity race the closer.

There was no pre-race concert Monday as scheduled performer Pitbull said he'd return next year to make good on his appearance. He said a scheduling conflict prevented him from staying in Daytona on Monday, but grand marshal Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson did stay the extra day and was the most popular attraction in pre-race activities.

Johnson was swarmed on the starting grid, in the fan zone and received the loudest ovation in the pre-race driver meeting, to which he showed up 30 minutes ahead of schedule wearing a black tank top.

The flexibility NASCAR has shown this month in working within its schedule to avoid inclement weather is practically unprecedented in the first 75 hours of the series. NASCAR, to start the month, moved the exhibition Clash at the Coliseum up a full day because of impending rain. At Daytona, it rescheduled the ARCA Series race from Saturday to Friday night, and made early decisions to move both the Xfinity and Cup Series races.

The decision to postpone the Cup race a day was made early Sunday morning and prevented fans from sitting in rain-soaked grandstands to see if the race would begin.

Just hours later, teams used Sunday's rain delay to reveal to The Associated Press that they have hired one of the country's top antitrust and sports lawyers to advise them in their ongoing dispute with NASCAR over a new revenue-sharing model.

The decision to hire Jeffrey Kessler, partner and co-executive chair of Winston & Strawn LLP, followed a meeting at Daytona that included the majority owner from every chartered team. Although the teams invited NASCAR representatives to attend, none did.

Kessler's hiring was revealed to AP by the five members of the team ownership negotiating committee. It comes amid a breakdown in negotiations between teams and NASCAR that led the 36 chartered teams to decline last month to extend their exclusive negotiating window with the sanctioning body on the existing deal.

## Widow, ex-prime minister and former police chief indicted in 2021 assassination of Haiti's president

By DÁNICA COTO and EVENS SANON Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — A judge in Haiti responsible for investigating the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse has indicted his widow, Martine Moïse, ex-prime minister Claude Joseph and the former chief of Haiti's National Police, Léon Charles, among others, according to a report obtained Monday.

The indictments are expected to further destabilize Haiti as it struggles with a surge in gang violence and recovers from a spate of violent protests demanding the resignation of current Prime Minister Ariel Henry.

Dozens of suspects were indicted in the 122-page report issued by Walther Wesser Voltaire, who is the fifth judge to lead the investigation after previous ones stepped down for various reasons, including fear of being killed.

Charles, who was police chief when Moïse was killed and now serves as Haiti's permanent representative to the Organization of the American States, faces the most serious charges: murder; attempted murder; possession and illegal carrying of weapons; conspiracy against the internal security of the state; and criminal association.

Meanwhile, Joseph and Martine Moïse, who was injured in the attack, are accused of complicity and criminal association.

Charles could not be immediately reached for comment, and Martine Moïse's attorney did not return a message for comment.

Meanwhile, Joseph, the former prime minister, shared a statement with The Associated Press accusing Henry of "undermining" the investigation and benefitting from the president's death.

"Henry ... is weaponizing the Haitian justice system, prosecuting political opponents like me. It's a classic coup d'état," Joseph said. "They failed to kill me and Martine Moïse on July 7th 2021, now they are using the Haitian justice system to advance their Machiavellian agenda."

Joseph again called on Henry to resign and noted that while he was still prime minister, he invited the FBI to help local authorities investigate the killing and wrote the U.N. and OAS for help.

"I won't stop my fight. Justice must be served," he said.

In his report, the judge noted that the former secretary general of the National Palace, Lyonel Valbrun, told authorities that he received "strong pressure" from Martine Moïse to put the president's office at the disposal of Joseph because he needed it to "organize a council of ministers."

Valbrun also said that two days before her husband was killed, Martine Moïse visited the National Palace and spent nearly five hours, from 10 p.m. to 3 a.m., removing "a bunch of things."

He said that two days after Jovenel Moïse was slain, Martine Moïse called to tell him that, "Jovenel didn't do anything for us. You have to open the office. The president told Ti Klod to create a council of ministers; he will hold elections in three months so I can become president, now we will have power."

While the document did not identify Ti Klod, the former prime minister, Claude Joseph, is known by that name.

The judge also stated in his report that Martine Moïse "suggested" she took refuge under the marital bed to protect herself from the attackers, but he noted that authorities at the scene found that not "even a giant rat...whose size measures between 35 and 45 centimeters" could fit under the bed.

The judge said the former first lady's statements were "so tainted with contradictions that they leave something to be desired and discredit her."

Others who face charges including murder are Christian Emmanuel Sanon, a Haitian-American pastor who visualized himself as Haiti's next president and said he thought Moïse was only going to be arrested; Joseph Vincent, a Haitian-American and former informant for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration; Dimitri Hérard, presidential security chief; John Joël Joseph, a former Haitian senator; and Windelle Coq, a Haitian judge whom authorities say is a fugitive.

Sanon, Vincent and Joseph were extradited to the U.S., where a total of 11 suspects face federal charges in the slaying of Haiti's president. At least three of them already have been sentenced.

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Meanwhile, more than 40 suspects are languishing in prison in Haiti awaiting trial, although it was not immediately clear how quickly one would be held following Monday's indictments. Among them are 20 former Colombian soldiers.

Milena Carmona, wife of Jheyner Alberto Carmona Flórez, told The Associated Press that he is innocent. "What's happening is that this crime is a conspiracy of great magnitudes in which powerful people are behind the scenes running everything, and that's why they're not given freedom," she said of the former soldiers.

U.S. prosecutors have described it as a plot hatched in both Haiti and Florida to hire mercenaries to kidnap or kill Moïse, who was 53 when he was slain at his private home near the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince.

The attack began late July 6 and ended July 7, according to witnesses.

Martine Moïse and others who were interrogated said they heard heavy gunfire starting around 1 a.m. that lasted between 30 to to 45 minutes before armed men burst into the bedroom of the presidential couple.

Moïse said she was lying on the ground when she heard the attackers yell, "That's not it! That's not it! That's not it!"

She said the suspects made a video call to identify the exact location of what they were searching as they killed the president. She added that she was face down when the suspects tilted her head and tugged on one of her toes "to ensure that she wasn't alive."

Once they left, Moïse said she dragged herself on the ground and whispered to her husband that she was going to try and go to the hospital.

"That's when she noticed that the president was dead and that his left eye had been removed from the socket," the report stated.

Moïse said a group of about 30 to 50 police officers were supposed to guard the presidential residence, but the judge noted that only a handful of officers were present that night. One officer told the judge that he heard explosions and a voice through a megaphone saying, "Do not shoot! It's a DEA operation! US Army! We know how many officers are inside. Exit with two hands lowered."

Another officer said the head of security of the first lady found her "in critical condition" surrounded by her two children. He said he also saw an undetermined number of people coming out of the president's residence "with briefcases and several envelopes in their possession."

The report quotes Inspector General André Vladimir Paraison saying that the president called him at 1:46 a.m. and told him, "Paraison! Man, hurry up! I'm in trouble! Come quickly and save my life." He said he encountered heavily armed men and couldn't access the residence immediately.

Officers at the scene said they found cars, windows and doors at the president's private home riddled with bullet holes, along with surveillance cameras cut off and a broken lock on the double-wooden door leading to the presidential bedroom.

The judge said some police officers at the residence were disarmed and handcuffed, while others "had time to throw themselves down a ravine" for safety. In addition, the police officer overseeing presidential security was accused of receiving \$80,000 to bribe certain officers "to remain inactive" during the assassination, according to the report.

The judge noted how "none of the police providing security to the head of state was in danger. Unfortunately, the head of state was assassinated with ease."

## Minnesota man who shot 2 officers and a firefighter wasn't allowed to have guns

By JOHN HANNA Associated Press

A man who died after fatally shooting two police officers and a firefighter in a wooded Minneapolis-area neighborhood wasn't legally allowed to have guns after a previous assault conviction and was entangled in a yearslong dispute over the custody and financial support of his three oldest children, court records show.

Authorities on Monday identified Shannon Gooden, 38, as the man who opened fire on police in the affluent suburb of Burnsville after they responded to a domestic disturbance call early Sunday. The un-



identified caller reported that Gooden had barricaded himself in his home with family members, including seven children aged 2 to 15. He was found dead inside the home hours later.

Authorities said Gooden killed Officers Paul Elmstrand and Matthew Ruge, both 27, and Adam Finseth, 40, a firefighter and paramedic who was assigned to the city's SWAT team. Another officer, Sgt. Adam Medicott, was shot and wounded.

Gooden's standoff with police came only two days before a scheduled district court hearing over his ongoing legal disputes with the mother of his three oldest children. The attorney representing Gooden in that dispute, Robert Manson, did not return a telephone message seeking comment. There was no answer Monday evening at a phone listing for a woman described in court records as Gooden's girlfriend.

Court records show the state barred Gooden from possessing guns after he pleaded guilty in 2008, aged 22, to second-degree assault with a dangerous weapon. Prosecutors said he threw rocks and pulled a knife on a man in a Burnsville shopping mall parking lot.

Authorities have not provided details about Sunday's call that led police to Gooden's home, and it's not clear exactly how he died. But court records suggest he cared for seven children — the three oldest by one woman, two more with another and that woman's two children from a previous relationship.

Court records also show his disputes over the parenting of his oldest three children had grown increasingly contentious. He accused their mother, Noemi Torres, of neglect and she called him "controlling" and accused him of abusing her and the children.

Torres told KARE-TV that their three kids, two boys aged 12 and 15 and a daughter, aged 14, were in the house during the standoff. She said that her daughter told Torres that Gooden put earmuffs on her before he started shooting, and that she wasn't scared until he asked, "Do you want to come with me?" meaning die with him.

Torres also told KARE-TV that Gooden had previously said he'd shoot police if she called 911 on him.

"I'm going to have a standoff," Torres quoted him as saying, according to brief interview excerpts KARE-TV posted on social media. "I'm going to kill everybody."

Prosecutors had opposed Gooden's effort to restore his right to possess guns after the 2007 incident, in which they said Gooden followed a young woman and a cousin from a mall to a parking lot and threatened to slash their tires. Gooden ran at the woman's brother with a knife, but a security guard disarmed him, so Gooden threw rocks at the brother before speeding away in his own vehicle, prosecutors said.

Gooden finished serving five years' probation for the 2007 assault charge in 2013.

When he petitioned a court unsuccessfully in 2020 to have his gun rights restored, he and his attorney said he had matured and that he regretted his past poor decisions.

"He is a good man to his peers and his family," one longtime friend wrote to the judge in August 2020. "He has personally guided me and many others through some very tough times all through the kindness of his heart."

Gooden said in a sworn statement: "I greatly regret and have learned from the poor decisions of my past. I would like to have a second chance to prove myself as a productive member of society."

## **A shaken Minnesota community gets some answers on the killings of 2 officers and 1 firefighter**

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — It started out as a 911 call about a domestic incident. It ended with two police officers, a firefighter and the suspect dead, a third officer wounded, and a mostly affluent suburb of Minneapolis badly shaken and waiting for answers.

Agents with the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension were still conducting their preliminary investigation into Sunday's shooting, spokesperson Bonney Bowman said Monday. They planned to share more information once that was complete.

That meant that several key questions remained unanswered. While the BCA named the suspect Monday

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evening, it has not said what prompted the 911 call early Sunday from a home in a wooded, well-to-do neighborhood of single-family homes on curvy streets in Burnsville, a city of around 64,000 located about 15 miles (24 kilometers) south of downtown Minneapolis.

The Hennepin County Medical Examiner's Office said Monday afternoon that Officers Paul Elmstrand and Matthew Ruge, both 27, and Adam Finseth, 40, a firefighter and paramedic who was assigned to the city's SWAT team, died of gunshot wounds in the emergency room at Hennepin County Medical Center in Minneapolis shortly after 6:30 a.m. Sunday.

The BCA said the medical examiner identified the man who killed them as Shannon Gooden, 38, of Burnsville. The agency did not say how he died. Court records show that Gooden wasn't legally allowed to have guns and had been entangled in a yearslong dispute over the custody and financial support of his three oldest children.

A procession of emergency vehicles escorted Finseth's body from the medical examiner's office in Minnetonka to a funeral home in Jordan on Monday afternoon, passing under several bridges where firefighters stood on their parked engines and flew American flags in tribute.

BCA Superintendent Drew Evans said Sunday that Burnsville police were called to the home around 1:50 a.m. Sunday about a "domestic situation where a man was reported to be armed and barricaded with family members in the home." That included seven children ages 2 to 15 years. Evans declined to say which resident called. Arriving officers "spent quite a bit of time" negotiating with Gooden, he said.

At some point — he declined to specify when — Gooden opened fire, killing the two officers and the firefighter. Another officer, Sgt. Adam Medicott, survived with injuries that were not life-threatening. He was released from a hospital and was recovering at home Monday, the city said.

Elmstrand's wife, Cindy Elmstrand-Castruita, told WCCO-TV that her husband "had to do what he thought was right to protect those little lives, even if it meant putting his at risk and it breaks my heart because now he's gone. But I know that he thought what he did was right."

Elmstrand joined the police department in 2017 and was a member of its mobile command staff. Ruge, hired in 2020, was on the department's crisis negotiations team and was a physical evidence officer. Finseth, who had been with the fire department since 2019, was shot while aiding the first officer who was injured, Evans said. Medicott, who joined the police department in 2014, supervises community service officers and is a drug recognition expert.

"Several officers" returned fire during the exchange, Evans said. Gooden fired from multiple places on both floors of the home. At least one officer was shot inside. An armored SWAT team vehicle sustained bullet damage to its windshield.

Evans said Gooden was armed with "several guns and large amounts of ammunition," though he declined to provide details.

Neighbors were startled awake by loud pops about an hour before sunrise. Alicia McCullum, who lives two houses down from the source of the commotion, told The Associated Press that she and her family dropped to the floor.

"I didn't think it was a gunshot at first, but then we opened the windows and we saw police everywhere and police hiding in our neighbors' yards," McCullum said. "Then there were three more gunshots."

The man was "reported to be deceased in the home" around 8 a.m., Evans said, and the children and other family members were later able to escape. McCullum said she saw a woman and a few children escorted out of the home.

The superintendent declined to say how long officers negotiated with Gooden, but the Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association said the standoff lasted for four hours before the SWAT team entered the home. Evans also declined to say whether the suspect killed himself or was shot by police.

Investigators will review body camera and other videos, conduct interviews and gather all available evidence as they determine what happened, he said.

"I know everybody wants to know exactly what occurred and really what led up to these really terrible events that occurred today," Evans told reporters. "But I ask that you have patience as we work though

that to piece together everything so that we can to provide the answers in due time.”

Gov. Tim Walz ordered that flags be flown at half-staff at all state-owned buildings. Members of the Minnesota House and Senate stood with bowed heads for moments of silence Monday.

“Our police officers and medics and fire, they come to work every day,” said Rep. Jeff Witte, of Lakeville, who served in the Burnsville Police Department for 27 years. “They do it willingly to protect and serve our communities, knowing that they may have to give up their life for a partner or the community. And if you’re not in the profession, you can’t understand: the goal is to go home to their families.”

## What we know about the Minnesota shooting that killed 2 officers and a firefighter

By JACK DURA and STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Two police officers and a firefighter who responded to a domestic situation at a suburban Minneapolis home were killed early Sunday during a standoff by a heavily armed man who shot at police from the home where seven children were also inside.

The suspect is dead, and another police officer was injured in the shooting in a neighborhood in Burnsville, Minnesota, a city of about 64,000 people near Minneapolis.

### WHAT HAPPENED?

Investigators are still putting together details of the shooting, which unfolded from a domestic call.

The Hennepin County Medical Examiner’s Office said late Monday that Burnsville Police Officers Paul Elmstrand and Matthew Ruge, both 27, and Adam Finseth, 40, a firefighter and paramedic who was assigned to the city’s SWAT team, died of gunshot wounds in the emergency room at Hennepin County Medical Center in Minneapolis shortly after 6:30 a.m. Sunday.

The suspect was identified by the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension on Monday as Shannon Gooden, 38, of Burnsville. Officials had said the suspect was armed with multiple guns and large amounts of ammunition. He had barricaded himself inside the home with his family, who included seven children ages 2 to 15.

Court records show Gooden wasn’t legally allowed to have guns and had been entangled in a yearslong dispute over the custody and financial support of his three oldest children. The bureau said the medical examiner will release his cause and manner of death at a later date.

According to court records, the state barred Gooden from possessing guns after he pleaded guilty in 2008, aged 22, to second-degree assault with a dangerous weapon. Prosecutors said he threw rocks and pulled a knife on a man in a Burnsville shopping mall parking lot.

An attorney representing Gooden in the custody dispute, Robert Manson, did not return a telephone message Monday seeking comment.

BCA Superintendent Drew Evans said negotiations lasted for hours before the suspect opened fire. He wasn’t specific on the exact amount of time, but the Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association said the standoff lasted four hours before a SWAT team entered the home.

The man shot at officers from multiple positions in the home, including the upper and lower floors, Evans said. At least one officer was shot inside. A police armored vehicle sustained bullet damage to its windshield.

“We still don’t know the exact exchange of gunfire that occurred,” Evans said. “Certainly several officers did return fire.”

Around 8 a.m. Sunday, Gooden was found dead. The family and children were released. None of them were hurt.

Evans said “there have not been many calls for service at all” at the home in the past.

### ‘THEY ARE HEROES’

Elmstrand joined the police department in 2017, and was a member of its mobile command staff. His wife, Cindy Elmstrand-Castruita, told WCCO-TV they began dating in high school after attending the same schools since kindergarten. They were married five years and had two children, a 2-year-old and a 5-month-old.

Elmstrand was a levelheaded person who loved his job and didn’t complain, despite horrible things he

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saw as part of his job, she said.

"I think he just had to be the hero. He had to do what he thought was right to protect those little lives even if it meant putting his (life) at risk and it breaks my heart because now he's gone. But I know that he thought what he did was right," she told the station.

Ruge, hired in 2020, was on the department's crisis negotiations team and was a physical evidence officer. Another police officer, Sgt. Adam Medicott, was released from a hospital Monday after suffering injuries that were not life-threatening, officials said.

"We're hurting," said Police Chief Tanya Schwartz. "Today, three members of our team made the ultimate sacrifice for this community. They are heroes."

## COMMUNITY, STATE MOURNS

The Minnesota House and Senate observed moments of silence Monday as Burnsville-area lawmakers paid tributes to the fallen officers and firefighter.

Flags in Minnesota have been lowered to half-staff in honor of those killed. Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz urged people walking past them to remember the fallen first responders.

"Minnesota mourns with you," he said. "The state stands ready to assist in any way possible."

Hundreds of people, including officers from other departments, gathered Sunday night outside Burnsville City Hall for a candlelight vigil for the victims.

U.S. Rep. Angie Craig said, "I can't imagine the pain that you're all going through, but what I can say is that to all our officers out there, the paramedics, our firefighters, thank you for what you do."

Area resident Kris Martin said, "It's an important community, and we feel very saddened by what happened."

## Wet winter storm hits California, closing regional airport and trapping people in swollen rivers

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Another wet winter storm swamped California with heavy rainfall on Monday, flooding the runways at a regional airport and leading to several rescues on swollen rivers and creeks.

The Santa Barbara airport, on the state's central coast, closed Monday after as much as 10 inches (25 centimeters) of rain had fallen in the area by noon, covering the runways with water.

"Commercial flights have been canceled, general aviation operations are paused, and the Terminal is closed," airport officials said in a statement posted on social media. "For info about specific flights, please contact your airline directly."

The National Weather Service had warned that California's central coast was at risk of "significant flooding," with up to 5 inches (12 cm) of rain predicted for many areas and isolated rain totals of 10 inches (25 cm) possible in the Santa Lucia and Santa Ynez mountain ranges as the storm headed toward greater Los Angeles.

The storm is expected to move through quicker than the devastating atmospheric river that parked itself over Southern California earlier this month, turning roads into rivers, causing hundreds of landslides and killing at least nine people.

Moderate showers were reported Monday afternoon but more rain was expected to impact the state through the night and into Tuesday, forecasters said.

The storm had already led to a number of rescues, including in San Luis Obispo County, where crews helped three people out of the rising Salinas River in the city of Paso Robles. Firefighters were getting ready to train on swift-water rescues when they received word that someone was stranded on an island in the river, Paso Robles Fire and Emergency Services Battalion Chief Scott Hallett told KSBY-TV.

Farther to the north, firefighters rescued two people from the top of their vehicle, which had stalled in flood waters in Sloughhouse, a community about 20 miles (32 kilometers) southeast of Sacramento, the Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District said.

Hours earlier, a man was rescued along a creek in El Dorado Hills, northeast of Sacramento. The man,



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who had been camping in the area, was trapped in a tree as floodwaters rose, El Dorado Hills Deputy Fire Chief Dave Brady told KCRA-TV.

Thunderstorms in valleys around the state capital on Monday could bring "brief tornadoes, large amounts of small hail, heavy rain, lightning, and gusty winds," the weather service in Sacramento warned on X.

Residents in the region, including Sacramento, Chico, Yuba City, Stockton and Modesto, "are advised to pay close attention to the weather," the office said later in a separate statement.

Kelly Curtis, a personal trainer in Long Beach, prepared by getting sandbags to protect her home where she has a training studio in the garage.

"I don't think it will be as bad as the last storm, but last time I got flooded and I kept the sandbags just in case," she said.

Forecasters said the storm would be strong enough to cause problems including flash flooding and power outages. Flood watches and warnings were issued in coastal and mountain areas up and down the state.

Several feet of snow is possible at elevations above about 6,800 feet (2,070 meters) across the Sierra Nevada, the weather service said. Motorists were urged to avoid mountain routes.

"Consider completing Sierra travel during the day Sunday, or rescheduling to later next week," said the weather service office in Reno, Nevada. The office issued a backcountry avalanche watch for the greater Lake Tahoe area and the eastern Sierra in Inyo and Mono counties.

The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services activated its operations center Saturday and positioned personnel and equipment in areas most at risk.

## Presidents Day: From George Washington's modest birthdays to big sales and 3-day weekends

By BEN FINLEY ASSOCIATED PRESS

NORFOLK, Va. (AP) — Like the other Founding Fathers, George Washington was uneasy about the idea of publicly celebrating his life. He was the first leader of a new republic — not a tyrant.

And yet the nation once again commemorated the first U.S. president on Monday, 292 years after he was born.

The meaning of Presidents Day has changed dramatically, from being mostly unremarkable and filled with work for Washington in the 1700s to the consumerism bonanza it has become today. For some historians the holiday has lost all discernible meaning.

Historian Alexis Coe, author of "You Never Forget Your First: A Biography of George of Washington," said she thinks about Presidents Day in much the same way as the towering monument in D.C. that bears his name.

"It's supposed to be about Washington, but can you really point to anything that looks or sounds like him?" she said. "Jefferson and Lincoln are presented as people with limbs and noses and words associated with their memorials. And he's just a giant, granite point. He has been sanded down to have absolutely no identifiable features."

Here is a look at how things have evolved:

### WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAYS

Washington was born Feb. 22, 1732, on Popes Creek Plantation near the Potomac River in Virginia.

Technically, though, he was born Feb. 11 under the ancient Julian calendar, which was still in use for the first 20 years of his life. The Gregorian calendar, intended to more accurately mark the solar year, was adopted in 1752, adding 11 days.

Either way, Washington paid little attention to his birthday according to Mountvernon.org, the website of the organization that manages his estate. Surviving records make no mention of observances at Mount Vernon, while his diary shows he was often hard at work.

"If he had it his way, he would be at home with his family," Coe said. "Maybe some beloved nieces and nephews (and friend) Marquis de Lafayette would be ideal. And Martha's recipe for an indulgent cake. But that's about it."

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Washington's birthday was celebrated by his peers in government when he was president — mostly. Congress voted during his first two terms to take a short commemorative break each year, with one exception, his last birthday in office, Coe said. By then Washington was less popular, partisanship was rampant and many members of his original Cabinet were gone, including Thomas Jefferson.

"One way to show their disdain for his Federalist policies was to keep working through his birthday," Coe said.

The Library of Congress does note that a French military officer, the comte de Rochambeau, threw a ball celebrating Washington's 50th birthday in 1782.

## AFTER HIS DEATH

Washington was very aware of his inaugural role as president and its distinction from the British crown. He didn't want to be honored like a king, said Seth Bruggeman, a history professor at Temple University in Philadelphia.

Still, he said, a market for Washington memorabilia sprang up almost immediately after his death in 1799 at age 67, with people snapping up pottery and reproductions of etchings portraying him as a divine figure going off into heaven.

"Even in that early moment, Americans kind of conflated consumerism with patriotic memory," said Bruggeman, whose books include "Here, George Washington Was Born: Memory, Material Culture, and the Public History of a National Monument."

## MAKING IT OFFICIAL

It wasn't until 1832, the centennial of his birth, that Congress established a committee to arrange national "parades, orations and festivals," according to the Congressional Research Service.

And only in 1879 was his birthday formally made into a legal holiday for federal employees in the District of Columbia.

The official designation is as Washington's Birthday, although it has come to be known informally as Presidents Day. Arguments have been made to honor President Lincoln as well because his birthdate falls nearby, on Feb. 12.

A small number of states, including Illinois, observe Lincoln's birthday as a public holiday, according to the Library of Congress. And some commemorate both Lincoln and Washington on Presidents Day.

But on the federal level, the day is still officially Washington's Birthday.

## SHIFT TO CONSUMERISM

By the late 1960s, Washington's Birthday was one of nine federal holidays that fell on specific dates on different days of the week, according to a 2004 article in the National Archives' Prologue magazine.

Congress voted to move some of those to Mondays, following concerns that were in part about absenteeism among government workers when a holiday fell midweek. But lawmakers also noted clear benefits to the economy, including boosts in retail sales and travel on three-day weekends.

The Uniform Monday Holiday Act took effect in 1971, moving Presidents Day to the third Monday in February. Sales campaigns soared, historian C. L. Arbelbide wrote in Prologue.

Bruggeman said Washington and the other Founding Fathers "would have been deeply worried" by how the holiday became taken over by commercial and private interests.

"They were very nervous about corporations," Bruggeman said. "It wasn't that they forbade them. But they saw corporations as like little republics that potentially threatened the power of The Republic."

Coe, who is also a fellow at the Washington think tank New America, said by now the day is devoid of recognizable traditions.

"There's no moment of reflection," Coe said. Given today's widespread cynicism toward the office, she added, that sort of reflection "would probably be a good idea."

## **Astronomers find what may be the universe's brightest object with a black hole devouring a sun a day**

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Astronomers have discovered what may be the brightest object in the universe, a quasar with a black hole at its heart growing so fast that it swallows the equivalent of a sun a day.

The record-breaking quasar shines 500 trillion times brighter than our sun. The black hole powering this distant quasar is more than 17 billion times more immense than our sun, an Australian-led team reported Monday in the journal *Nature Astronomy*.

While the quasar resembles a mere dot in images, scientists envision a ferocious place.

The rotating disk around the quasar's black hole — the luminous swirling gas and other matter from gobbled-up stars — is like a cosmic hurricane.

"This quasar is the most violent place that we know in the universe," lead author Christian Wolf of Australian National University said in an email.

The European Southern Observatory spotted the object, J0529-4351, during a 1980 sky survey, but it was thought to be a star. It was not identified as a quasar — the extremely active and luminous core of a galaxy — until last year. Observations by telescopes in Australia and Chile's Atacama Desert clinched it.

"The exciting thing about this quasar is that it was hiding in plain sight and was misclassified as a star previously," Yale University's Priyamvada Natarajan, who was not involved in the study, said in an email.

These later observations and computer modeling have determined that the quasar is gobbling up the equivalent of 370 suns a year — roughly one a day. Further analysis shows the mass of the black hole to be 17 to 19 billion times that of our sun, according to the team. More observations are needed to understand its growth rate.

The quasar is 12 billion light-years away and has been around since the early days of the universe. A light-year is 5.8 trillion miles.

## **Waffle House shooting in Indianapolis leaves 1 dead, 5 injured, police say**

By ISABELLA VOLMERT Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — One woman was killed and five other people were wounded when an argument escalated to gunfire at a Waffle House restaurant in Indianapolis early Monday, police said.

Officers responded to a report of a shooting at the restaurant around 12:30 a.m., the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department said in a statement.

Five people with gunshot wounds were transported to a hospital, including a woman who was in critical condition and died, police said. The other victims — a woman and three men — all were listed in stable condition.

A sixth man who was shot traveled separately to a hospital and was listed in critical condition, police said.

Investigators believe an altercation between two groups at the restaurant escalated to gunfire. It was not immediately clear if any of the victims fired shots, police said.

No one has been arrested and police are investigating.

Two police officers remained at the scene Monday morning around 10 a.m. as members of the Indianapolis-Marion County forensic services agency crime scene unit entered the building. Law enforcement took down police tape that barricaded the restaurant's parking lot around 10:30 a.m.

A spokesperson for Waffle House said the company is referring all questions about the shooting to local law enforcement.

"We are cooperating fully with the ongoing law enforcement investigation into this incident," Njeri Boss, vice president of public relations, said in a written statement.

## Israel says Brazil's president unwelcome until he apologizes for comparing Gaza war to Holocaust

By MELANIE LIDMAN and ELEONORE HUGHES Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's foreign minister said Monday that Brazil's president would not be welcome in Israel until he apologizes for comments he made comparing Israel's war in Gaza to the Holocaust, accusing him of a "very serious antisemitic attack."

On Sunday, President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said that "what is happening in the Gaza Strip and to the Palestinian people hasn't been seen in any other moment in history. Actually, it did when Hitler decided to kill the Jews." Lula made the comments while speaking to reporters at the African Union summit in Ethiopia.

Foreign Minister Israel Katz summoned the Brazilian ambassador to Israel's national Holocaust museum in Jerusalem on Monday for a reprimand.

"The things that Lula said when he compared the righteous war of the State of Israel against Hamas, which murdered and massacred the Jews, and Hitler and the Nazis is shameful and unacceptable," Katz said.

Following Israel's reaction to Lula's comments, Brazil on Monday recalled the country's ambassador to Israel, Frederico Meyer, for consultations.

Brazil's foreign affairs minister Mauro Vieira also summoned the Israeli ambassador Daniel Zonshine "in light of the seriousness of this morning's statements by the Israeli government," according to a statement from his ministry.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday that Lula's comments "trivialized the Holocaust" and "crossed a red line."

Such comments strike a raw nerve in Israel, a country established as a haven for Jews in the wake of the Holocaust. Israel says its war in Gaza, launched in response to a deadly Hamas attack on Oct. 7, is defensive and rejects any comparisons of its offensive to the Holocaust.

Lula's comments came after leaders at the African Union summit on Saturday condemned Israel's offensive in Gaza and called for its immediate end.

In the Oct. 7 attack, Hamas militants stormed into southern Israel and killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took around 250 hostage. Militants still hold around 130 hostages, a fourth of them believed to be dead. Most of the others were released during a weeklong cease-fire in November.

The war has killed at least 29,092 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants. Around 80% of Gaza's population have been driven from their homes, and a quarter face starvation.

The heavy death toll and widespread damage have led to mounting criticism of Israel and growing calls for a cease-fire.

Celso Amorim, former foreign affairs minister and a special adviser to Lula, told local news outlet G1 that Israel's reaction was "absurd."

"It only increases Israel's isolation. Lula is sought after all over the world and at the moment it's Israel that's (persona) non grata," Amorim said.

Brazil's presidential palace did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

First lady Rosângela da Silva, Lula's wife, said she was proud of her husband for defending peace and the right to life for women and children. "The speech referred to the genocidal government and not to the Jewish people, let's be honest in our analysis," she said.

"Netanyahu should be concerned about the rejection he arouses in the world and in his own country, before trying to reprimand anyone who denounces his policy of exterminating the Palestinian people. He has no moral or political authority to point the finger at anyone," Gleisi Hoffmann, president of Lula's Workers' Party, told Folha de Sao Paulo newspaper.

Last week, Lula met with the prime minister of the Palestinian Authority, Mohammad Shtayyeh, before participating in the African Union summit in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa.

After the meeting, Brazil's presidential palace said: "Lula condemned Hamas attacks against Israeli civilians, indicated agreement with the need for a cease-fire and reiterated the Brazilian government's



commitment to the two-state solution — with an economically viable Palestinian state, living in peace and security with Israel, within mutually agreed and internationally recognized borders.”

## Indiana freelance reporter charged after threatening to kill pro-Israel U.S. officials

FORT WAYNE, Ind. (AP) — A freelance reporter based in Fort Wayne, Indiana is facing up to five years in federal prison after allegedly threatening to “kill every Jew” in the city and “shoot every pro-Israel U.S. government official,” according to a federal affidavit filed in court last week.

Jeffrey Stevens, 41, is charged with posting threats using interstate communications, which carries a maximum of five years in federal prison. He was first reported to the FBI after “multiple concerning Facebook posts” following the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel, according to the affidavit.

In an interview with the FBI on Feb. 2, Stevens admitted to posting on the CIA’s website that he was going to shoot pro-Israel U.S. government officials, according to the affidavit. He also admitted to sending the Fort Wayne Police Department a message on Facebook saying he would “kill every Jew.”

He said during the interview that he was drunk when he posted the messages, the affidavit says.

Stevens is also alleged to have posted that he will “make sure that every CIA member who is pro-Israel is eliminated.”

The Detroit News first reported the affidavit Monday.

The affidavit was filed on Feb. 12 in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Indiana.

Stevens was arrested last week and will remain in custody, according to an Feb. 16 order from a federal judge.

Stevens’ attorney did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

A survey released Tuesday by the American Jewish Committee found one quarter of American Jews said they have been the target of antisemitism in the past year. The national survey found that nearly two-thirds of American Jews feel less secure in the U.S. than they did a year ago.

## Wisconsin’s Democratic governor signs his new legislative maps into law after Republicans pass them

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Wisconsin Democratic Gov. Tony Evers signed new legislative district maps into law on Monday that he proposed and that the Republicans who control the Legislature passed to avoid having the liberal-controlled state Supreme Court draw the lines.

Democrats hailed the signing as a major political victory in the swing state where the Legislature has been firmly under Republican control for more than a decade, even as Democrats have won 14 of the past 17 statewide elections.

“When I promised I wanted fair maps — not maps that are better for one party or another, including my own — I damn well meant it,” Evers said prior to signing the maps into law at the state Capitol. “Wisconsin is not a red state or a blue state — we’re a purple state, and I believe our maps should reflect that basic fact.

Democrats are almost certain to gain seats in the state Assembly and state Senate under the new maps, which will be in place for the November election. Republicans have been operating since 2011 under maps they drew that were recognized as among the most gerrymandered in the country.

Democrats tried unsuccessfully for more than a decade to overturn the Republican-drawn maps. But it wasn’t until control of the state Supreme Court flipped in August after the election of liberal Justice Janet Protasiewicz that Democrats found a winning formula.

They filed a lawsuit the day after Protasiewicz joined the court. Republicans argued that Protasiewicz shouldn’t hear the lawsuit because she said during her campaign that the GOP-drawn maps were “rigged” and “unfair.” But she did not recuse herself.

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Protasiewicz ended up providing the deciding fourth vote in a December ruling that declared the current maps to be unconstitutional because not all of the districts were contiguous, meaning some areas were geographically disconnected from the rest of the district. The court said it would draw the lines if the Legislature couldn't pass maps that Evers would sign.

The court accepted maps from the governor, Democratic and Republican lawmakers, as well as three other parties to the redistricting lawsuit. Consultants hired by the court determined that maps submitted by the Legislature and a conservative law firm were "partisan gerrymanders," leaving the court with four Democratic-drawn maps to choose from.

Facing a mid-March deadline from the state elections commission for new maps to be in place, the Legislature on Tuesday passed the Evers maps. While skeptical Democrats voted against the governor's plans, many of the party's leaders praised Evers' signing of the new maps Monday.

"Wisconsin will no longer be among the most gerrymandered states in the nation," Assembly Democratic Leader Greta Neubauer said in a statement. Neubauer, who voted against the maps, added that "this is the beginning of a new era in Wisconsin — where the will of the people will once again be the law of the land."

Senate Democratic Leader Dianne Hesselbein said in a statement that the new maps are "a huge win for the people of Wisconsin" — even though she voted against the maps.

Wisconsin Democratic Party Chairman Ben Wikler said the new maps will have a "reverse coattails" effect benefitting Democrats in the statewide presidential and U.S. Senate races this year because more legislative races will be competitive.

Republicans described having no better option. Republican Assembly Speaker Robin Vos said Monday in a statement that Evers "signed the most Republican-leaning maps out of all the Democrat-gerrymandered maps being considered by the Wisconsin Supreme Court."

"This fall Republicans will prove that we can win on any maps because we have the better policy ideas for the State of Wisconsin," said Vos.

Other Republicans were even more stark after the passage of the bill last week.

"Republicans were not stuck between a rock and hard place," Republican state Sen. Van Wanggaard said in a statement. "It was a matter of choosing to be stabbed, shot, poisoned or led to the guillotine. We chose to be stabbed, so we can live to fight another day."

Democrats also raised concerns that under the bill, the maps wouldn't take effect immediately. That raises a legal question for any special or recall elections that take place before November, given that the state Supreme Court already ruled that the old maps are unconstitutional.

Evers said Monday that "these maps will take effect immediately after publication and will be in place for the fall elections." He also asked the state Supreme Court to clarify that the maps will be in effect for any special elections prior to the November election.

Under the new maps, there would be 15 incumbents in the Assembly who would be forced to run against another incumbent and six such pairings in the Senate. Only one of the Assembly pairings would pit one Democratic incumbent against another one. In the Senate, the only Democratic pairing includes an incumbent who has already decided not to run this fall.

Litigation continues in more than a dozen states over U.S. House and state legislative districts that were enacted after the 2020 census.

The Wisconsin Supreme Court also has been asked by Democrats to take up a challenge to the state's congressional district lines. The lawsuit argues the court's decision to order new state legislative maps opens the door to challenging the congressional map. Republicans hold six of the state's eight congressional seats.

## US circulates rival UN resolution for temporary Gaza cease-fire after rejecting Arab proposal

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The United States has circulated a rival U.N. Security Council resolution that would support a temporary cease-fire in Gaza after rejecting an Arab-backed resolution demanding an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in the conflict-wracked territory.

The U.S. draft resolution, obtained Monday by The Associated Press, would underscore that a temporary cease-fire “as soon as practicable” requires the release of all hostages taken from Israel after Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack, and calls for the lifting of all restrictions on the delivery of humanitarian aid.

The U.S. draft says both of those actions “would help to create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities” as called for in a resolution adopted by the council on Dec. 22.

The proposed resolution says Israel’s planned major ground offensive into the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where some 1.5 million Palestinians have sought safety, “should not proceed under current circumstances.” And it warns that further displacement of civilians, “including potentially into neighboring countries,” a reference to Egypt, would have serious implications for regional peace and security.

The Security Council is expected to vote Tuesday morning on the Arab-backed draft resolution circulated by Algeria, which represents the 22 Arab nations in the U.N.’s most powerful body.

In addition to a cease-fire, the final Algerian draft, obtained by AP, also demands the immediate release of all hostages and reiterates council demands that Israel and Hamas “scrupulously comply” with international law, especially the protection of civilians, and rejects the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians.

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said in a statement Sunday that the United States has been working on a hostage deal for months that would bring at least a six-week period of calm “from which we could then take the time and the steps to build a more enduring peace.”

She said U.S. President Joe Biden has had multiple calls over the last week with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the leaders of Egypt and Qatar to push the deal forward. Qatar said Saturday the talks “have not been progressing as expected.”

“Though gaps remain,” Thomas-Greenfield said, “the key elements are on the table” and it remains the best opportunity to reunite hostages with their families and enable a prolonged pause in fighting that would allow lifesaving aid to get to Palestinian civilians who desperately need it.

By contrast, the Arab-backed resolution wouldn’t achieve those outcomes, “and indeed, may run counter to them,” she said. “For that reason, the United States does not support action on this draft resolution. Should it come up for a vote as drafted, it will not be adopted.”

U.S. deputy ambassador Robert Wood told several reporters Monday that the Algerian draft is not “an effective mechanism for trying to do the three things that we want to see happen — which is get hostages out, more aid in, and a lengthy pause to this conflict.”

With the U.S. draft, “what we’re looking at is another possible option and we’ll be discussing this with friends going forward,” Wood said. “I don’t think you can expect anything to happen tomorrow.”

Arab nations, supported by many of the 193 U.N. member countries, have been demanding a cease-fire for months as Israel’s military offensive in response to the Hamas attack has intensified, with the number of Palestinians killed now surpassing 29,000, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which doesn’t distinguish between civilians and combatants but says the majority are women and children.

The Arab Group chair this month, Tunisia’s U.N. Ambassador Tarek Ladeb, told U.N. reporters last Wednesday that some 1.5 million Palestinians who sought safety in Gaza’s southern city of Rafah face a “catastrophic scenario” if Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu goes ahead with a potential evacuation of civilians and military offensive in the area bordering Egypt.

Netanyahu ordered the military to come up with a plan for Rafah’s evacuation, but Israel hasn’t announced a plan or timeline.

The Algeria draft resolution also expresses “grave concern over the dire and urgently deteriorating humanitarian situation” in Gaza and reiterates the council’s call for unhindered humanitarian access throughout the territory, where U.N. officials say a quarter of the 2.3 million population are facing starvation.

## New York Archdiocese denounces transgender activist's funeral held at St. Patrick's Cathedral

By BRIAN P. D. HANNON Associated Press

The funeral of a renowned transgender activist in a New York cathedral elicited a denunciation of the event by a senior church official, who called the Mass a scandal within one of the preeminent houses of worship in U.S. Catholicism.

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York condemned the funeral of Cecilia Gentili, which was held in St. Patrick's Cathedral in Manhattan and drew a large audience on Thursday.

Gentili was known as a leading advocate for other transgender people, as well as sex workers and people with HIV. A post on her Instagram account announced her death on Feb. 6 at age 52.

In a written statement released Saturday, the Rev. Enrique Salvo, pastor of Saint Patrick's, thanked those who "share our outrage over the scandalous behavior" at the funeral.

"The Cathedral only knew that family and friends were requesting a funeral Mass for a Catholic, and had no idea our welcome and prayer would be degraded in such a sacrilegious and deceptive way," Salvo said in the statement.

Videos of Gentili's funeral show an estimated audience of more than 1,000 celebrants, including transgender people and other friends and supporters chanting her name, applauding, singing and offering praise of her stature as a leading light of the city's LGBTQ+ community.

During one eulogy that was widely circulated on social media, Gentili was celebrated as "Saint Cecilia, the mother of all whores."

Salvo called the behavior at the Mass a "scandal" and a "potent reminder of how much we need the prayer, reparation, repentance, grace, and mercy to which this holy season (of Lent) invites us."

In a statement, Gentili's family denied that the church had been deceived and said the gathering "brought precious life and radical joy to the Cathedral in historic defiance of the Church's hypocrisy and anti-trans hatred."

"The only deception present at St. Patrick's Cathedral is that it claims to be a welcoming place for all," the family said.

A former sex worker who suffered addiction and was jailed at Rikers Island, Gentili became a transgender health program coordinator, a nonprofit policy director for an established gay men's health organization, GMHC, and a lobbyist for health equality and anti-discrimination legislation, among other advocacy work.

Gentili founded the COIN Clinic, short for Cecilia's Occupational Inclusion Network, a free health program for sex workers through the Callen-Lorde community health organization in New York.

"New York's LGBTQ+ community has lost a champion in trans icon Cecilia Gentili," New York Gov. Kathy Hochul posted on X, formerly Twitter, following Gentili's death.

Gentili acted in the FX television series "Pose," about the underground ballroom dance scene in the 1980s and 1990s. She also performed two one-woman stage shows.

"I am an atheist, but I am always asking God for things," Gentili said in "Red Ink," her autobiographical show touching on topics including her childhood in Argentina and lack of religious faith.

St. Patrick's Cathedral, a Manhattan architectural and tourist landmark, has been the site of funerals for numerous prominent New Yorkers including Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, Babe Ruth and emergency responders who died in the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack.

Conservative group CatholicVote condemned fellow "Pose" actor Billy Porter, whose singing performance during the funeral was characterized by the group as a mockery of the "Our Father" prayer. "This is just unbelievable and sick," CatholicVote said on X.

In a statement before the song, Porter called Gentili a leader among "an entire community of people who transformed my life forever."

"Grief is singular, it's individual. Please know that however you grieve is what's right," Porter said. "There's no right or wrong way to grieve. But just make sure that you do, you allow yourself to do that, so that we can get to the other side of something that feels a little bit like grace."



## Stalled US aid for Ukraine underscores GOP's shift away from confronting Russia

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

At about 2 a.m. last Tuesday, Republican Sen. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin stood on the Senate floor and explained why he opposed sending more aid to help Ukraine fend off the invasion launched in 2022 by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"I don't like this reality," Johnson said. "Vladimir Putin is an evil war criminal." But he quickly added: "Vladimir Putin will not lose this war."

That argument — that the Russian president cannot be stopped so there's no point in using American taxpayer dollars against him — marks a new stage in the Republican Party's growing acceptance of Russian expansionism in the age of Donald Trump.

The GOP has been softening its stance on Russia ever since Trump won the 2016 election following Russian hacking of his Democratic opponents. There are several reasons for the shift. Among them, Putin is holding himself out as an international champion of conservative Christian values and the GOP is growing increasingly skeptical of overseas entanglements. Then there's Trump's personal embrace of the Russian leader.

Now the GOP's ambivalence on Russia has stalled additional aid to Ukraine at a pivotal time in the war.

The Senate last week passed a foreign aid package that included \$61 billion for Ukraine on a 70-29 vote, but Johnson was one of a majority of the Republicans to vote against the bill after their late-night stand to block it. In the Republican-controlled House, Speaker Mike Johnson said his chamber will not be "rushed" to pass the measure, even as Ukraine's military warns of dire shortages of ammunition and artillery.

Many Republicans are openly frustrated that their colleagues don't see the benefits of helping Ukraine. Putin and his allies have banked on democracies wearying of aiding Kyiv, and Putin's GOP critics warn that NATO countries in eastern Europe could become targets of an emboldened Russia that believes the U.S. won't counter it.

"Putin is losing," Republican Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina said on the floor before Johnson's speech. "This is not a stalemate." Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky was one of 22 Republican senators to back the package, while 26 opposed it.

The divide within the party was on stark display Friday with the prison death of Russian opposition figure and anti-corruption advocate Alexei Navalny, which President Joe Biden and other world leaders blamed on Putin. Trump notably stood aside from that chorus Monday in his first public comment on the matter that referred to Navalny by name.

Offering no sympathy or attempt to affix blame, Trump posted on Truth Social that the "sudden death of Alexei Navalny has made me more and more aware of what is happening in our Country. It is a slow, steady progression, with CROOKED, Radical Left Politicians, Prosecutors, and Judges leading us down a path to destruction."

Nikki Haley, his Republican presidential primary rival, said Monday that Trump is "siding with a thug" in his embrace of Putin.

Tillis responded to Navalny's death by saying in a post, "History will not be kind to those in America who make apologies for Putin and praise Russian autocracy."

Johnson, the House speaker, issued a statement calling Putin a "vicious dictator" and pledging that he "will be met with united opposition," but he did not offer any way forward for passing the aid to Ukraine.

Within the Republican Party, skeptics of confronting Russia seem to be gaining ground.

"Nearly every Republican Senator under the age of 55 voted NO on this America Last bill," Missouri Sen. Eric Schmitt, elected in 2022, posted on the social media site X after the vote last week. "15 out of 17 elected since 2018 voted NO. Things are changing just not fast enough."

Those who oppose additional Ukraine aid bristle at charges that they are doing Putin's handiwork. They contend they are taking a hard-headed look at whether it's worth spending money to help the country.

"If you oppose a blank check to another country, I guess that makes you a Russian," Alabama Sen.

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Tommy Tuberville said on the Senate floor, after posting that conservative commentator Tucker Carlson's recent controversial interview of Putin shows that "Russia wants peace" in contrast to "DC warmongers."

Rep. Matt Gaetz, a leading opponent of Ukraine aid in the House, described the movement as "a generational shift in my party away from neoconservatism toward foreign policy realism."

In interviews with voters waiting to see Trump speak Saturday night in Waterford Township, Michigan, none praised Putin. But none wanted to spend more money confronting him, trusting Trump to handle the Russian leader.

Even before Trump, Republican voters were signaling discontent with overseas conflicts, said Douglas Kriner, a political scientist at Cornell University. That's one reason Trump's 2016 promise to avoid "stupid wars" resonated.

"Some of it may be a bottom-up change in a key part of the Republican base," Kriner said, "and part of it reflects Trump's hold on that base and his ability to sway its opinions and policy preferences in dramatic ways."

Trump has long praised Putin, calling his invasion of Ukraine "smart" and "savvy," and recalling this month that he had told NATO members who didn't spend enough on defense that he would "encourage" Russia to "do whatever the hell they want" to them. He reiterated that threat days later.

Despite the reluctance within the GOP to continue supporting Ukraine, Russia remains deeply unpopular in the U.S. A July 2023 Gallup poll found that just 5% had a favorable view of Putin, including 7% of Republicans.

But Putin has positioned his country as a symbol of Christian conservatism and resistance to LGBTQ rights, while portraying himself as an embodiment of masculine strength. The combination has appealed to populist conservatives across the Western world. Putin's appeal in some sectors of the right is demonstrated by Carlson's recent tour of Russia, after which the conservative host posted videos admiring the Moscow subway and a supermarket that he says "would radicalize you against our leaders."

"The goal of the Soviet Union was to be the beacon of left ideas," said Olga Kamenchuk, a professor at Northwestern University. "Russia is now the beacon of conservative ideas."

Kamenchuk said this is most visible not in Putin's U.S. poll numbers, but in fading Republican support for Ukraine. About half of Republicans said the U.S. is providing "too much" support to Ukraine when it comes to Russia's invasion, according to a Pew Research poll in December. That's up from 9% in a Pew poll taken in March 2022, just weeks after Russia invaded.

When Putin attacked Ukraine, there was bipartisan condemnation. Even a year ago, most Republicans in Congress pledged support. But around the same time, Trump was lamenting that U.S. leaders were "suckers" for sending aid.

By the fall, the party was divided. Republicans refused to include another round of Ukraine funding in the government spending bill, insisting that Democrats needed to include a border security measure to earn their support.

After Trump condemned the compromise border proposal, Republicans sank the bill, leaving Ukraine backers no option but to push the assistance as part of a foreign aid package with additional money for Israel and Taiwan.

Several experts on Russia note that the rhetoric the GOP uses against Ukraine aid can mirror Putin's own — that Ukraine is corrupt and will waste the money, that the U.S. can't afford to look beyond its borders and that Russia's victory is inevitable.

"He's trying to create the perception that he's never going to be beaten, so don't even try," Henry Hale, a George Washington University political scientist, said of Putin.

Skeptics of Ukraine aid argue the war has already decimated the Russian military and that Putin won't be able to target other European countries.

"Russia has shown in the last two years that they do not have the ability to march through Western Europe," said Russell Vought, Trump's former director of the Office of Management and Budget who is now president of the Center for Renewing America, which opposes additional Ukraine funding.

But several experts noted that Putin has alluded to plans to retake much of the former Soviet Union's territory, which could include NATO countries such as Lithuania and Estonia that the U.S is obligated under its treaty to defend militarily.

Sergey Radchenko, a professor at Johns Hopkins' School of Advanced International Studies, noted that Russia for decades has hoped the U.S would lose interest in protecting Europe: "This was Stalin's dream, that the U.S. would just retreat to the Western hemisphere."

## **What's happening in eastern Congo and why aid groups are warning of a new humanitarian crisis**

By GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — Aid organizations fear a new humanitarian crisis in the restive eastern Congo region, where the renowned armed rebel group M23 is in the midst of a new advance that threatens to cut off a major city and leave millions of people struggling for food and medical help.

Eastern Congo has been beset by conflict for years, with M23 among more than 100 armed groups vying for a foothold in the mineral-rich area near the border with Rwanda. Some have been accused of carrying out mass killings.

There's been an upsurge in fighting in recent weeks between M23 rebels and Congo army forces, and it comes as the United Nations plans to withdraw peacekeepers from the region by the end of the year.

Tensions are also rising between Congo and Rwanda, with them blaming each other for supporting various armed groups. Congo accuses Rwanda of backing M23.

This weekend, the U.S. State Department condemned what it called the "worsening violence." A group of aid agencies has estimated that 1 million people have already been displaced by fighting in the last three months.

### **WHO ARE M23?**

The March 23 Movement, or M23, is a rebel military group mainly made up of ethnic Tutsis that broke away from the Congolese army just over a decade ago. They staged a large offensive in 2012 and took over the provincial capital of Goma near the border with Rwanda, the same city they are threatening again.

The conflict has regional complications, with neighboring Rwanda also accused by the U.S. and U.N. experts of giving military aid to M23. Rwanda denies that but effectively admitted on Monday that it has troops and missile systems in eastern Congo. Rwanda said that is to safeguard its own security because of what it claims is a buildup of Congo army forces near the border. Rwanda has rejected calls from the U.S. to withdraw.

There are also ties to the Rwandan genocide of 30 years ago, with M23 and Rwanda saying separately that they are fighting a threat from a Congolese rebel group that is connected to the Congo army and partly made up of ethnic Hutus who were perpetrators of the 1994 genocide.

### **CONGO-RWANDA TENSIONS**

Relations between Congo and its eastern neighbor have been fraught for decades. Hundreds of thousands of Rwandan Hutu refugees had fled to Congo, then Zaire, in the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Among them were soldiers and militiamen responsible for the slaughter of 800,000 minority Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

Two years after the genocide, Rwanda and Uganda invaded eastern Congo to try and root out what remained of those genocide perpetrators, which led to the toppling of then Congo President Mobutu Sese Seko.

Tensions between Congo and Rwanda escalated in 2021 with the resurgence of M23 attacks on Congolese soldiers after nearly a decade of relative inactivity due to a 2013 peace deal. The presence of so many armed groups is believed to be connected to illegal mining, with eastern Congo rich in gold and other minerals.

### **WHAT'S HAPPENED IN RECENT WEEKS?**

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M23 launched new attacks late last year and has ramped them up in recent weeks. The group is now threatening to take the key town of Sake, about 27 kilometers (16 miles) west of Goma. That could cause food and aid supplies to be cut off from Goma, which had a population of around 600,000 a few years ago, but now holds more than 2 million people, according to aid agencies, as people flee violence in surrounding towns and villages.

The advance of rebels on Sake "poses an imminent threat to the entire aid system" in eastern Congo, the Norwegian Refugee Council said. It said 135,000 people were displaced in just five days in early February.

The violence has also sparked protests from the capital, Kinshasa, to Goma, with angry demonstrators saying the international community is not doing enough to push back against M23 and not taking a hard enough stance against Rwanda.

## WHAT'S AT STAKE?

The new fighting could lead to an escalation of regional tensions and involve more countries. As the U.N. winds down its 25-year peacekeeping mission in eastern Congo, a multi-national force under the southern African regional bloc is set to step in. That force will include soldiers from regional power South Africa, Malawi and Tanzania. They will help the Congo army forces, but it might put them in direct conflict with Rwanda.

There's also the humanitarian cost. The International NGO Forum in Congo, a group of non-governmental organizations working in the region, said the escalation in fighting has involved artillery attacks on civilian settlements, causing a heavy toll and forcing many health and aid workers to withdraw.

Eastern Congo already had one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with nearly 6 million people previously displaced because of conflict, according to the U.N. Refugee Agency.

There are concerns a new disaster could largely go unnoticed because of the attention on the war in Gaza and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

## **Palestinian diplomat accuses Israel of apartheid and asks UN court to declare its occupation illegal**

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — The Palestinian foreign minister on Monday accused Israel of apartheid and urged the United Nations' top court to declare that Israel's occupation of lands sought for a Palestinian state is illegal and must end immediately and unconditionally for any hope for a two-state future to survive.

The remarks came at historic hearings into the legality of Israel's 57-year occupation. The case opened against the backdrop of the Israel-Hamas war, which immediately became a focal point of the day — even though the hearings were meant to center on Israel's open-ended control over the occupied West Bank, the Gaza Strip and annexed east Jerusalem.

Palestinian Foreign Affairs Minister Riad Malki told the International Court of Justice that "2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza, half of them children, are besieged and bombed, killed and maimed, starved and displaced."

"More than 3.5 million Palestinians in the West Bank, including in Jerusalem, are subjected to colonization of their territory and racist violence that enables it," he added.

International law expert Paul Reichler, representing the Palestinians, told the court that the policies of Israel's government "are aligned to an unprecedented extent with the goals of the Israeli settler movement to expand long term control over the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in practice to further integrate those areas within the territory" of Israel.

The hearings follow a request by the U.N. General Assembly for a non-binding advisory opinion into Israel's policies in the occupied territories. Judges will likely take months to issue an opinion.

Israel's representatives were not scheduled to speak but submitted a five-page letter to the court last July that was published after Monday's hearing.

In the letter, Israel said that the questions put to the court are prejudiced and "fail to recognize Israel's



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right and duty to protect its citizens," address Israeli security concerns or acknowledge Israel-Palestinians agreements to negotiate issues, including "the permanent status of the territory, security arrangements, settlements, and borders."

"While the request made to the Court seeks to portray it as such, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not a cartoon narrative of villain and victim in which there are no Israeli rights and no Palestinian obligations," it said. "Entertaining such a falsehood can only push the parties further apart rather than help create conditions to bring them closer together."

In court, Malki cited the right to self-determination enshrined in the U.N. charter as he told judges that "for decades, the Palestinian people have been denied this right and have endured both colonialism and apartheid."

The Palestinians argue that Israel, by annexing large swaths of occupied land, has violated the prohibition on territorial conquest and the Palestinians' right to self-determination, and has imposed a system of racial discrimination and apartheid.

"This occupation is annexation and supremacist in nature," Malki said and appealed to the court to uphold the Palestinian right to self-determination and declare "that the Israeli occupation is illegal and must end immediately, totally and unconditionally."

After the hearing, Malki said that the court's opinion could increase chances for peace. "This ruling could help both Palestinians and Israelis to finally live side by side in peace, mutual security and dignity," he told reporters.

An unprecedented 51 countries and three international organizations will address the court in the coming days.

Palestinians and leading rights groups argue that the occupation goes far beyond defensive measures. They say it has morphed into an apartheid system, bolstered by settlement building on occupied lands, that gives Palestinians second-class status and is designed to maintain Jewish hegemony from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. Israel rejects any accusation of apartheid.

Israel captured the West Bank, east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians seek all three areas for an independent state. Israel considers the West Bank to be disputed territory, whose future should be decided in negotiations.

It has built 146 settlements across the West Bank, according to watchdog group Peace Now, many of which resemble fully developed suburbs and small towns. The settlements are home to more than 500,000 Jewish settlers, while around 3 million Palestinians live in the territory.

Israel annexed east Jerusalem and considers the entire city to be its capital. An additional 200,000 Israelis live in settlements built in east Jerusalem that Israel considers to be neighborhoods of its capital. Palestinian residents of the city face systematic discrimination, making it difficult for them to build new homes or expand existing ones.

Israel withdrew all of its soldiers and settlers from Gaza in 2005, but continued to control the territory's airspace, coastline and population registry. Israel and Egypt imposed a blockade on Gaza when the Palestinian militant Hamas group seized power there in 2007.

The international community overwhelmingly considers the settlements to be illegal. Israel's annexation of east Jerusalem, home to the city's most sensitive holy sites, is not internationally recognized.

It's not the first time the court has been asked to give an advisory opinion on Israeli policies.

In 2004, it said a separation barrier Israel built through east Jerusalem and parts of the West Bank was "contrary to international law." It also called on Israel to immediately halt construction. Israel has ignored the ruling.

Also, late last month, the court ordered Israel to do all it can to prevent death, destruction and any acts of genocide in its campaign in Gaza. The order came at a preliminary stage of a case filed by South Africa accusing Israel of genocide, a charge that Israel denied.

Palestinian U.N. Ambassador Riyad Mansour, at times overcome with emotion, concluded Monday's hearing with an impassioned plea to the 15-judge panel to "guide the international community in upholding

international law, ending injustice and achieving a just and lasting peace.”

He urged judges to “guide us towards a future in which Palestinian children are treated as children, not as (a) demographic threat, in which the identity of the group to which we belong does not diminish the human rights to which we are all entitled.”

## Long after tragic mysteries are solved, families of Native American victims are kept in the dark

By SCOTT SONNER Associated Press

It was the winter of 2021 when Philbert Shorty’s family found his abandoned car stuck in the mud outside the small community of Tsaille near the Arizona-New Mexico state line. “We knew something happened from the get-go,” said his uncle, Ben Shorty. “We couldn’t find any answers.”

Family members reported the 44-year-old man missing. And for the next two years, they searched — hiking through remote canyons on the Navajo Nation, placing advertisements on the radio and posting across social media in hopes of unearthing any clues.

The efforts produced nothing. They had no way of knowing he’d been killed more than a week before they reported him missing.

They remained unaware even as U.S. prosecutors finalized a plea deal last summer with Shiloh Aaron Oldrock, who was charged in connection with Shorty’s death as a result of a separate investigation into the killing and beheading of Oldrock’s uncle. The 30-year-old Fargo, North Dakota, man told authorities his uncle had threatened to kill him during an alcohol-fueled fight that came eight months after the pair conspired to cover up Shorty’s death by dismembering and burning his body on Jan. 29, 2021.

In both cases, Oldrock told investigators, a night of heavy drinking and fighting ended in death at his uncle’s home near Navajo, New Mexico.

The details of this tale are more gruesome than most. Yet to those living in Indian Country, the elements underlying the tragedy are all too familiar. Generations of unaddressed trauma combine with substance abuse to create a dangerous recipe that often ends in violence, and law enforcement resources and social support programs are too sparse to offer much help.

DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES ARE GETTING NOTICED. WILL IT HELP?

Shorty’s story is one of many across the United States and Canada, where high rates of missing persons and unsolved killings involving Indigenous people have captured the attention of policymakers at the highest levels.

In 2019, former President Donald Trump signed an executive order establishing a task force. Congress followed in 2020 by passing two key pieces of legislation aimed at addressing the crisis. U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, who had championed legislation as a congresswoman, has been working under the Biden administration to solve some of the systemic problems and jurisdictional challenges that have left victims’ families feeling invisible.

The Interior Department is nearly three weeks passed a deadline for responding to a set of recommendations from a special commission that spent months traveling the country, speaking with family members, advocates and police officials about how best to tackle the epidemic.

Commission members heard hours of heartbreaking testimony from family members who have fought to keep their cases in the spotlight, often memorializing those lost with prayer vigils, special blankets and buttons, traditional ribbon skirts and red handprints painted on sidewalks and buildings.

Like others, Shorty’s family now knows the suffering will linger despite the increased emphasis on solving such crimes.

Shorty’s family “had been left in the dark about what happened,” U.S. Attorney for the District of New Mexico Alexander Uballez acknowledged in a November sentencing memo that referred to Shorty by only his initials — PS. Wrote Uballez: “They are just beginning to grieve as they were only informed recently that PS was deceased, rather than missing.”

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Ubaldez expressed hope that putting Oldrock behind bars would bring some closure, saying that Shorty's elderly aunt could stop looking down the driveway in hopes her nephew might one day return.

Ubaldez said Oldrock's convictions were part of the U.S. Justice Department's duty to bring answers to tribal communities. While no amount of investigation or prosecution will bring back a loved one, he said, law enforcement partners will meet each case "with urgency, transparency and coordination."

## PROMISES THAT MAY OR MAY NOT LEAD SOMEWHERE

That vow of transparency is what has Native American families frustrated. Many say authorities regularly fail to communicate about the status of pending cases. In Shorty's case, unanswered questions about whether there were any remains recovered have left his family guessing as to whether they can ever have a burial for him.

"The investigators never called me. They were supposed to but never did," Ben Shorty said in a recent interview. "It was all done behind closed doors."

The FBI's most recent list of missing people from the Navajo Nation still included Philbert Shorty. That's despite investigators having had reason to believe he was dead as early as October 2021 with Oldrock's confession. A medical investigator's report issued the following spring said that while it couldn't be confirmed conclusively, communications with law enforcement suggested that charred remains found at the home of Oldrock's uncle likely were those of Shorty.

Darlene Gomez, an Albuquerque attorney, has represented dozens of Native American families. The handling of Shorty's case doesn't surprise her.

"The FBI does this all the time," she said. "They don't even talk to the family until there is an indictment. And very often they don't say anything at all."

While there is a need to keep confidential certain details as investigations move forward, federal authorities did not immediately respond to questions by The Associated Press about the process for sharing information with families and whether people were assigned to serve as liaisons to help families as cases move through the system.

The federal Not Invisible Act Commission devoted part of its 212-page report to related concerns and recommendations. The report references stories shared by families about difficulties in accessing police and autopsy reports: "Families are often kept waiting, not knowing if the person identified is their family member or not knowing the cause and circumstances of death nor how the body of their family member was handled."

It all rings true for Bernadine Beyale, the daughter of retired Navajo police officers who founded the non-profit 4 Corners K-9 Search and Rescue in Farmington, New Mexico, in 2022. Her group has conducted dozens of individual searches, and she has helped to build bridges between families and law enforcement to help families avoid feeling like their cases are falling through cracks.

"Even if (law enforcement) would just talk to the families, say, 'We don't have anything yet but we're still working on it,' it would help," she said.

## 'I TRY TO BE AS TRANSPARENT AS POSSIBLE'

Records obtained by the AP show that a witness gave a ride to Oldrock in October 2021. He had cuts on his face and blood on his hands and clothes. He told the driver he had just killed his uncle, identified as Erwin Beach. He said he believed Beach had killed his grandmother a year earlier and was going to kill him, too.

Oldrock told the FBI he stabbed Beach repeatedly after Beach swung an axe at him during a drunken fight. Oldrock said the chain of violent events that October day began much the same way as when Shorty was killed months earlier — with heavy drinking. Oldrock was sentenced in November to 35 years in prison for second-degree murder in the killing of Beach and involuntary manslaughter in Shorty's death.

Whether details are unveiled through court documents or they come from investigators in the field, Beyale acknowledges it can be difficult to decide how to share information with victims' families.

"If we find a body or remains, I don't give a lot of details," she said. "But I try to be as transparent as possible and tell them we don't have a positive ID but we found remains in this area."

Bayale tries to persuade families who want to conduct their own search to let her do it instead. "I always ask them if they are not only physically ready to do a search like that, but also mentally ready to find something," she said. "They always say, 'Yeah, yeah.' But they are not. I've not found one family that was mentally ready."

Shorty's family still hopes to have a funeral. They're ready for closure but are — still — waiting on investigators.

"What are we supposed to bury? Just nothing? At least some ashes or something," Ben Shorty said. "We got nothing still."

## **Most of Russia's opposition is either dead, in exile abroad or in prison at home. What happens now?**

By EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Alexei Navalny was asked four years ago what he'd tell Russians if he were killed for challenging President Vladimir Putin.

"You're not allowed to give up," he told a documentary maker. "If they decide to kill me, it means we are incredibly strong and we need to use this power."

Russia's prison agency announced Friday that Navalny had died in the Arctic penal colony where he was serving a 19-year sentence on charges of extremism. His death sparked accusations around the world that he had been killed.

### WHAT DOES THE OPPOSITION DO NOW?

Kremlin political critics, turncoat spies and investigative journalists have been killed or assaulted in a variety of ways. The Russian opposition has lost its brightest star with Navalny's sudden death. Now the question on everyone's mind: What does it do now?

Most of Russia's opposition is either dead, scattered abroad in exile or in prison at home. Remaining opposition groups and key political figures have different visions about what Russia should become, and who should lead it. There is not even an anti-war candidate on the ballot to give Putin a token challenge in next month's election for a sixth term.

### THE END OF DISSENT?

Although Navalny's widow, Yulia Navalnaya, has vowed to continue his work, many are wondering if his elimination from the picture is the end of political dissent in Russia.

"Alexei Navalny was a very bright and charismatic leader. He had the talent to ignite people, to convince them of the need for change," said Mikhail Khodorkovsky, a former tycoon who spent a decade in prison in Russia on charges widely seen as political revenge for challenging Putin's rule in the early 2000s.

"This is a very difficult loss for the Russian opposition," he told The Associated Press after his death.

Graeme Robertson, a professor of political science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and author of a book about Putin and contemporary Russian politics, says the biggest problem that has plagued the Russian opposition "is that it has been unable to break out from small liberal circles to attract support from the broader population."

Khodorkovsky, who lives in London, is one of several Russian opposition politicians trying to build a coalition with grassroots anti-war groups across the world and exiled Russian opposition figures. They include Russian chess legend Garry Kasparov, Mikhail Kasyanov, a former Russian prime minister and Vladimir Kara-Murza, who is currently serving a 25-year prison sentence in Russia for treason after criticizing Russia's war in Ukraine.

But, in a reflection of how the opposition is splintered, Navalny's team, and the Anti-Corruption Foundation he founded, are not a part of it.

"We constantly tell the guys from the Anti-Corruption Foundation ... that it would be great if we all met not only in front of television cameras, but sat down at the table," Khodorkovsky said in another interview before Navalny's death, referring to a television debate in January hosted by the independent Russian TV



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channel Dozhd.

While Navalny was the first leader to build a national Russian opposition, there were other opposition factions who didn't like him or his organization.

Before his death, there were public and heated disagreements on social media between members of his team and other politicians about how they could challenge Putin in March's upcoming election.

## PUTIN CONSOLIDATES POWER

Meanwhile, the Russian leader has continued to consolidate his grip on power, cracking down on dissent at home, imprisoning critics of the war in Ukraine, and silencing independent media.

Squabbling among the opposition, "doesn't help," said Nigel Gould-Davies, a former British ambassador to Belarus and senior fellow for Russia & Eurasia at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London.

But, even if the opposition were united, he questioned whether "given the instruments of coercion, repression and intimidation available to the Russian state, what difference, at least in the short term, would that make?"

## THREE DECADES OF PUTIN

Putin is eyeing at least another six years in the Kremlin, which means he could effectively rule Russia for almost three decades.

Russia's remaining opposition leaders and activists, largely outside the country, are now grappling with the question of how to mount an effective challenge to the Kremlin. That would mean breaking through state propaganda to reach Russians inside the country and offer them an alternative to the Kremlin's vision of the future.

It is a difficult task, one which even Navalny struggled with after he returned to Moscow in February 2021 to face certain arrest after recuperating in Germany from a nerve agent poisoning he blamed on the Kremlin.

Shortly after his return while he was in jail, his team released a social media investigation into corruption that was viewed millions of times. It provoked a series of anti-graft protests across Russia but the police brutally cracked down and detained thousands of people.

While Navalny's team continued to publish successful investigative reports, they ultimately suspended the protests and said they would switch to different tactics.

Although Navalny had his finger on the pulse, and his team succeeded in widely publicizing the investigation, the anti-corruption message ultimately failed to produce political change inside Russia, Robertson said, because most Russians "know their country is badly governed and that their elite is corrupt, but they don't see it being any other way."

In the three years since Navalny was jailed, Russian authorities have introduced more laws tightening freedom of speech and jailing critics, often ordinary people, sometimes for decades.

Khodorkovsky said the response to Navalny's death should be to join forces and continue work started before he died, trying to convince ordinary Russians to protest in any way they can during March's presidential election.

He called on Russians to protest by writing Navalny's name on the ballot paper during the election. The Russian Anti-War Committee, backed by Khodorkovsky and other politicians, is also asking Russians to attend "Noon against Putin" — calling on people to gather at polling stations at 12 p.m. on March 17 as a signal that they don't support Putin.

The idea was supported by Navalny in early February.

## OPPOSITION IN EXILE

In the meantime, the Russian opposition faces a future largely in exile without one of its brightest leaders.

It will be incredibly difficult, but Russia's exiled politicians say they are determined that the hope of democracy in their country does not die along with Navalny.

"Putin," Khodorkovsky said, "must understand that he can kill his political opponent, but not the very idea of a democratic opposition."

## Norway will transfer funds to the Palestinian Authority after a monthslong standoff with Israel

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Norway says it will transfer tax funds to the Palestinian Authority that have been frozen for months because of a dispute with Israel.

Under interim peace agreements dating back to the early 1990s, Israel collects taxes and customs on behalf of the PA, which administers parts of the occupied West Bank and also helps pay for public services in Gaza.

After Hamas' Oct. 7 attack triggered the war in Gaza, Israel reduced the transfers by the amount that is spent on the territory. The PA refused to accept the partial transfers, even though it relies on the taxes to cover most of its budget.

Under the agreement announced on Sunday, Israel will transfer all the funds to Norway. The Scandinavian country will in turn transfer funds for the West Bank to the Palestinian Authority while holding those destined for Gaza.

"The temporary scheme will play a crucial role in preventing the Palestinian Authority from collapsing financially," it said in a statement Sunday. The transfer will allow the PA to pay salaries to teachers, health workers and other public employees.

"Ensuring that the Palestinian Authority does not collapse and can provide essential services to the population is vital to safeguarding the very existence of the Authority, promoting a political process and realizing a future two-state solution," Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide said.

There was no immediate comment from Israel or the Palestinian Authority.

Israel has reduced the tax transfers in the past to protest the PA's payments to families of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel and those slain in the conflict, including militants who killed Israeli civilians.

Israel says such payments reward and incentivize violence, while the Palestinians view them as a source of social welfare for people harmed by the conflict.

The United States, Israel's top ally, is pushing for a postwar settlement in which a revitalized Palestinian Authority would govern the West Bank and Gaza ahead of eventual statehood. Netanyahu has rejected that idea, saying Israel must maintain open-ended security control over both territories.

Hamas seized power in Gaza in 2007 after a prolonged political crisis, driving forces loyal to the PA out in a week of street battles and confining the PA's authority to parts of the occupied West Bank.

Norway played a key role in brokering the 1993 Oslo Accords that launched the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. But no serious or substantive peace talks have been held since Netanyahu returned to office in 2009, and his government is opposed to the creation of a Palestinian state.

## Today in History: February 20

### John Glenn becomes first American to orbit the Earth

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Feb. 20, the 51st day of 2024. There are 315 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 20, 1962, astronaut John Glenn became the first American to orbit the Earth as he flew aboard Project Mercury's Friendship 7 spacecraft, which circled the globe three times in a flight lasting 4 hours, 55 minutes and 23 seconds before splashing down safely in the Atlantic Ocean 800 miles southeast of Bermuda.

On this date:

In 1792, President George Washington signed an act creating the United States Post Office Department.

In 1862, William Wallace Lincoln, the 11-year-old son of President Abraham Lincoln and first lady Mary Todd Lincoln, died at the White House, apparently of typhoid fever.

In 1905, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Jacobson v. Massachusetts*, upheld, 7-2, compulsory vaccination

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laws intended to protect the public's health.

In 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt signed an immigration act which excluded "idiots, imbeciles, feebleminded persons, epileptics, insane persons" from being admitted to the United States.

In 1933, Congress proposed the 21st Amendment to the U.S. Constitution to repeal Prohibition.

In 1938, Anthony Eden resigned as British foreign secretary following Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's decision to negotiate with Italian dictator Benito Mussolini.

In 1965, America's Ranger 8 spacecraft crashed on the moon, as planned, after sending back thousands of pictures of the lunar surface.

In 1987, a bomb left by Unabomber Ted Kaczynski exploded behind a computer store in Salt Lake City, seriously injuring store owner Gary Wright.

In 1998, Tara Lipinski of the U.S. won the ladies' figure skating gold medal at the Nagano (NAH'-guh-noh) Olympics; Michelle Kwan won the silver.

In 2003, a fire sparked by pyrotechnics broke out during a concert by the group Great White at The Station nightclub in West Warwick, Rhode Island, killing 100 people and injuring about 200 others.

In 2005, death claimed actor Sandra Dee at age 62; musical actor John Raitt at age 88; and counter-culture writer Hunter S. Thompson at age 67.

In 2020, a poll by the Associated Press and the NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found more Americans expressing some concern about catching the flu than about catching the coronavirus.

In 2021, Naomi Osaka won her fourth Grand Slam trophy by pulling away to beat Jennifer Brady 6-4, 6-3 in the Australian Open final.

Today's birthdays: Racing Hall of Famer Roger Penske is 87. Singer-songwriter Buffy Sainte-Marie is 83. Hockey Hall of Famer Phil Esposito is 82. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., is 82. Movie director Mike Leigh is 81. Actor Brenda Blethyn is 78. Actor Sandy Duncan is 78. Actor Peter Strauss is 77. Rock musician Billy Zoom (X) is 76. Former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown is 73. Actor John Voldstad is 73. Newspaper heiress Patricia Hearst is 70. Actor Anthony Head is 70. Country singer Leland Martin is 67. Actor James Wilby is 66. Rock musician Sebastian Steinberg is 65. Comedian Joel Hodgson is 64. Basketball Hall of Famer Charles Barkley is 61. Rock musician Ian Brown (Stone Roses) is 61. Actor French Stewart is 60. Actor Ron Eldard is 59. Model Cindy Crawford is 58. Actor Andrew Shue is 57. Actor Lili Taylor is 57. Actor Andrea Savage is 51. Singer Brian Littrell is 49. Actor Lauren Ambrose is 46. Actor Jay Hernandez is 46. Actor Chelsea Peretti is 46. Country musician Coy Bowles is 45. Actor Michael Zegen is 45. Actor Majandra Delfino is 43. Actor Jocko Sims is 43. Singer-musician Chris Thile is 43. Actor-singer Jessie Mueller is 41. MLB All-Star pitcher Justin Verlander is 41. Comedian Trevor Noah is 40. Actor Jake Richardson is 39. Actor Daniella Pineda is 37. Actor Miles Teller is 37. Singer Rihanna is 36. Actor Jack Falahee is 35.